

THE PERFECT LOVER

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

ALFRED SUTRO

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THE PERFECT LOVER.

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A Play in Four Acts

BY
ALFRED SUTRO

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TO MY FRIEND

Israel Zangwill,

The following is a copy of the original Bill

THE IMPERIAL THEATRE

Lessee and Manager: Mr. LEWIS WALLER

On Saturday, 14th October, 1905, and every evening at 8:30.

An Original Play in Four Acts, by

ALFRED SUTRO

ENTITLED

THE PERFECT LOVER

"Different men love differently, and different things"

JOSEPH TREMBLETT.....	Mr. Lewis Waller.
WILLIAM TREMBLETT.....	Mr. Norman McKinnel.
LORD CARDEW.....	Mr. Frank Mills.
JOHN COLLIS.....	Mr. Arthur Lewis.
HARRIS.....	Mr. Patrick Digan.
MORGAN.....	Mr. S. B. Brereton.
PORTER.....	Mr. C. McGuinness.
MARTHA TREMBLETT.....	Miss Edyth Olive
MAY.....	Miss Eve Titheradge.
HON. SUSAN LESSON.....	Miss Henrietta Watson.
MRS. MORPHITT.....	Miss Helen Ferrers.
MRS. BARTER.....	Miss Gwendolen Floyd
MRS. BONHAM.....	Miss Helen Leyton.
LILIAN TREMBLETT.....	Miss Evelyn Millard.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENERY.

- ACT I. Study in Joseph Tremblett's House, Camden Town.
- ACT II. Drawing Room in William Tremblett's House in Sussex Gardens.
- ACT III. Studio at Miss Lesson's.
- ACT IV. Same as Act I.

THE PERFECT LOVER.

ACT I.

SCENE.—JOE TREMBLETT'S study in his house in Camden Town. It is a large, rather bare apartment, right at the top—half attic, half studio. There is one big window at back, looking over roofs and chimneys; a great table is in the centre, covered with books and papers; in front of the fire stands a heavy, old-fashioned chair, the covering worn off in places, showing the dull brown material beneath. On a small side table is a typewriter. Nailed on the walls are a few cheap photographs of Italian Old Masters—also two engravings in black frames, one of Whistler's Portrait of his Mother, the other of Thomas Carlyle; ranged along two shelves, evidently the work of an amateur carpenter, are numbers of well-thumbed books. A great jar, filled with daffodils, stands on Joe's desk.

(As the Curtain rises, MAY, a sweet-faced girl of seventeen, is seated in front of the small table, tapping away energetically at the typewriter. She has a newspaper before her, from which she is evidently copying. JOHN COLLIS, comes in—a tall man, with a heavy, bloated face, who wears a long, rather ragged, moustache. MAY does not notice him, and goes on with her work.)

COLLIS. Hullo, kiddie! Where's your pa?

MAY. (*Stopping and turning round*) He's not back yet, Uncle John. But he'll be here soon.

COLLIS. Have I toiled up four flights in vain! (*He goes to the cupboard*) Locked! And some idiot pretends that it's fascinating to stand in front of a locked door!

MAY. Only when you don't know what's behind it, Uncle John! But as you *do* know—

COLLIS. Well, how's the typewriting? How many words a minute?

MAY. Only forty so far—but I hope soon—

COLLIS. (*peeping over her shoulder, and pointing to the paper she has in front of her*) What is it you're doing?

MAY. It's the wonderful speech Lord Rosebery made yesterday—

COLLIS. (*grunting*) Ugh! So you're interested in politics, eh?

MAY. No—only, as I type it, I feel as though it were I—I, the orator, looking before me at the great sea of faces—

COLLIS. And feeling pretty sick, I can tell you—

MAY. (*turning to him and clasping her hands*) Oh! to be a man, and have the power!

COLLIS. (*Sneering*) Yes—it's a fine thing to be a man, and have the power! I've been a man for forty-nine years—and next time, please, I want to be a big dog, or a canary.

MAY. (*reproachfully*) Uncle John!

COLLIS. (*turning away*) That's all right—you go on with your work, and look at that sea of faces!

MAY. (*rising and laying a hand on his arm*) How is it you've never had any ambition, Uncle John?

COLLIS. (*pedantically*) I yield a melancholy acquiescence to the unnatural decrees of an incontrovertible injustice. (*He turns her to him*) How do you like that?

MAY. (*shaking her head*) I don't know what it means.

COLLIS. It's literature, my child—literature. Very few men talk literature—I am one of them! So you're ambitious, eh?

MAY. (*stoutly*) Yes, I am.

COLLIS. (*sniggering*) Well—so was your pa.

MAY. (*warmly*) And hasn't he written some wonderful novels?

COLLIS. Oh yes—we all write wonderful novels—that nobody buys—and then we have to provide for our family—and are glad to get three hundred a year as assistant editor to a weekly twaddletub! There's ambition for you!

MAY. (*protesting*) Papa—

COLLIS. Papa's a great man, I know. I wish I'd married—I'd have children to admire me, too.

MAY. You'd have had to work then, Uncle John.

COLLIS. Work! Am I not a poet? When did you

hear of poets working? Why don't you admire my poetry?

MAY. I'm not allowed to read it, Uncle John.

COLLIS. Well—at least you've something to look forward to. (*pompously*) One book—one slender volume—contains the soul of John Collis!

(*MARTHA enters, hurriedly. She is a pleasant-faced woman of thirty-eight, prettily but inexpensively dressed.*)

COLLIS. Hullo, Martha! You look excited!

(*MARTHA stops, by the door, evidently not too pleased at seeing her brother. MAY runs across the room to her.*)

COLLIS. Rent? No—can't be—I've not had a summons—

MARTHA. (*proudly*) We are never behind with our rent; and owe no man a penny.

COLLIS. Aren't you ashamed to air such vicious principles before a young and receptive mind?

MARTHA. (*frowning*) What do you want, John?

COLLIS. To see Joe. And—incidentally—to have the key of that cupboard.

MARTHA. (*emphatically*) Certainly not.

COLLIS. Gods of Hospitality! And I am her elder brother!

MARTHA. And I don't know when Joe will be back.

COLLIS. Witness's statement distinctly at variance with that of kiddie.

MARTHA. Come in later if you like. I've something important to say to Joe.

COLLIS. When you write your reminiscences, kiddie, tell the world how eminent poet was treated by his relations.

MARTHA. Poet! You've not written a line for twenty years!

COLLIS. Poetry, Martha, went out with the crinoline. Shall I offer my nectar to a generation that wallows in small-beer? And, talking of beer—
(*he looks enquiringly at her*)

(*She shakes her head. MAY also shakes her head.*)

Ah! not even beer! Well, I shall leave you. But I shall return.

MARTHA. (*Scornfully*) To borrow money!

COLLIS. (*going*) You have a prophetic instinct, Martha, that would be invaluable on the Sporting Press.

MARTHA. And you're not ashamed—

COLLIS. I have merely applied the Times system to loans. Instead of Joe lending me five pounds at once—which might have embarrassed him—he pays me half a crown weekly, and received my gratitude, delivered free, with the first instalment. Au revoir!
(*he goes, jauntily*)

MARTHA. (*sitting and shaking her head*) Ugh!

He's your uncle—but well there! To come cadging for half-crowns on poor Joe!—May, you didn't tell him Uncle Willie had been here?

MAY. No, mother. But why did Uncle Willie come, and why wasn't I to tell? And look—(*she produces a sovereign*)—look what he gave me! (*she kneels by MARTHA'S side*)

MARTHA. (*amazed*) A sovereign! Uncle Willie gave you that!

MAY. Yes. And he said—just to show you what money's like.

MARTHA. Ah! Well, remember—not a word to your father.

MAY. No—I'll be very careful—(*she puts the sovereign into her purse again—then looks up*) Mother, we haven't *very* nice uncles, have we?

MARTHA. No! *My* brother, who won't work, and borrows money; and your father's brother, who does nothing *but* work, and save money. (*she throws her arms around MAY and draws her to her*) Well, never mind! May, dear, when your father comes I want a word with him—so you'll give Tommy and Alice their dinner, and see they go off to school and don't quarrel—

MAY. Yes, mother.

MARTHA. You'll have to be careful with Sarah—she's in one of her tantrums again—

MAY. Oh! I'm sorry!

MARTHA. The butcher's boy has left—and she seems to imagine I've kidnapped him!—You've been hard at work, May?

MAY. Oh yes—I'm getting on nicely, I think—Mother, why *did* Uncle Willie give me that sovereign?

MARTHA. He told you—to see what money was like. Oh, I understand!

MAY. (*puzzled*) He has never given me anything before—

MARTHA. And never will again—you may be quite sure of that—

MAY. (*eagerly*) And may I do what I like with the sovereign, mother?

MARTHA. Whatever you like! Though *I* know where it will go!

MAY. (*eagerly*) Mother, mother, the photograph of that Velasquez father was so eager to have!

MARTHA. (*wistfully*) You love him more than you do me, May.

MAY. (*kissing her*) Mother, the dear old dad! We can't love him too much! (*a knock*)

MARTHA. Come in.

(*Enter MISS LESSON. She is an elderly lady, with gray hair, combed straight back—and wears a black garment, something like a curé's frock, hanging straight down to the ankles, without any ornament, or attempt at ornament, whatsoever. The dress is cut short; and she has square shoes, of the sensible order, with plain black buckles. Her hat is merely a covering for the head; and, in its absolute simplicity, may have been bought, and have been fashionable, twenty years ago. Her appearance, for all*

its eccentricity, is distinctly pleasing and womanly—in no single particular does she ape male costume—her face is rather determined, but shows kindness and a keen sense of humour. She is brusque and abrupt in her speech, but her voice is singularly melodious; and she has about her the unmistakable cachet of the “grande dame.”)

MARTHA. (*surprised*) Miss Lesson! (*she goes eagerly to her*)

MISS LESSON. (*shaking hands*) The lady who let me in refused to do more than admit me. She grunted ‘upstairs’—so I came upstairs. How are you?

MARTHA. Oh, Miss Lesson, I’m so sorry! This is one of Sarah’s bad days.

MISS LESSON. Don’t mention it, Mrs. Tremblett! Not always good-tempered myself—don’t see why servants should be. (*she crosses over to MAY*) Well, my pretty little May! I’ve—come to say good-bye.

MARTHA. Good-bye?

MISS LESSON. (*sitting in the arm-chair*) Yes, I’m going to Canada—with Walter.

MARTHA. What! Not for good, surely!

MISS LESSON. That’s what he says. And as I’ve been a model aunt to the boy ever since he was in short frocks—

MAY. (*nestling close to Miss Lesson*) Why does he go, Miss Lesson? A peer—in the House of Lords—he can speak, whenever he wants to—

MISS LESSON. Only there’s no one to listen, my

dear—Chancellor asleep on the Woolsack—might as well make a speech on the top of the Himalayas! Besides he always has been fond of farming—and he has bought two thousand acres at some unpronounceable place—

MARTHA. (*confidentially to MISS LESSON*) Well—perhaps he'll marry out there!

MISS LESSON. (*shaking her head*) No. He never will marry. He's the type of the perfect lover. Though there are others. Different men love differently, and different things. But anyway, Walter's constant. I'm sorry enough—

MAY. (*opening wide eyes*) Constant? (*turning to MARTHA*) Lord Cardew? To whom? (*she turns to MISS LESSON*) And why doesn't she—

MISS LESSON. (*patting her cheek*) Ah, my dear little May, that was not meant for you! But there still are some men who can only love once in their life—

MARTHA. And you really are going with him?

MISS LESSON. Oh yes! One place or another—

MAY. You'll miss your painting, Miss Lesson?

MISS LESSON. Oh, I'll work out there! Wonderful country, they tell me—lots of stuff! And I mean to milk the cows, you know—and if they won't let me I'll—paint 'em!

MAY. Oh, Miss Lesson, I should like to go with you!

MARTHA. And leave us, May?

MAY. Mother! As if you thought that! But

how lovely if we could all get away! Camden Town is so ugly!

MISS LESSON. Wait till the Fairy Prince comes, little May! When *he's* there—Camden town or Canada—it's always—Fairyland! Isn't it, Mrs. Tremblett? Tell me, will your husband be long?

MARTHA. I'm expecting him every minute.

MISS LESSON. I hope he'll come soon. I've *such* a lot to do!

MAY. Of course. You must say good-bye to all your friends!

MISS LESSON. I've only acquaintances, my dear, of whom some are more intimate than others. Don't let's use the word 'friend' too lightly. I had one, and she's dead. (*she lays a hand gently on MAY's shoulder*)

MAY. Aren't *we* friends of yours, Miss Lesson?

MISS LESSON. (*affectionately*) *Very* intimate acquaintances! Oh, I'm a great stickler for precision!

(JOE TREMBLETT *comes in. He is a man of forty-four or forty-five, with a fine, sensitive, eager face, brown hair that has grown a little silver at the temples, and brown eyes that can still smile, though there are heavy lines around them. MAY runs to him, and passes her arm through his*)

MAY. Here he is! Here's Daddy!

MISS LESSON. Ah, Mr. Tremblett! You're just in time—to receive my parting benediction!

JOE. (*shaking hands with her*) Why? You're not going away?

MISS LESSON. (*nodding*) With Walter—to Canada—farming.

JOE. What!

MISS LESSON. Fact! There's a shop you know, in Cockspur Street, where they sell land across the counter, as though it were ribbons; and as they can't send it home to *us*, we're going to *it*.

JOE. Wonderful! And when do you come back?

MISS LESSON. At present we say never—which may of course mean next year. I told my stock-broker I'd return when there was a genuine boom in Kaffirs. He said his grandson would be happy to receive me.

JOE. (*laughing*) Let's hope there'll be a Stock Exchange handy.

MISS LESSON. Make me very unhappy if there isn't! I should miss my little gambles. I invested my last five pounds yesterday—bought two Chartered—

JOE. Do you think it quite wise to go off like this?

MISS LESSON. Had my doubts—till I found all my swagger relations disapproved—*that* reassured me! Well, I'll be off. Shan't wait for Walter—

JOE. He's coming this morning?

MISS LESSON. Oh yes. We start to-morrow.

JOE.

MARTHA. } To-morrow!

MISS LESSON. My motto—strike while the iron's heating!

MAY. (*reproachfully*) And you only come to us now!

MISS LESSON. Always leave the best grape to the last!

JOE. What time do you start? I'll be at the station—

MISS LESSON. 4.05, from Euston—we go straight on board. But don't see us off—hate being seen off—feel like the man who apologized for taking so long to die. Good-bye, Mr. Tremblett.

JOE. Good-bye, Miss Lesson. And how about Art?

MISS LESSON. I'll send home masterpieces, you'll see! I still keep *your* autographs, you know—among the doubtfuls. There's no telling—you may be famous yet.

JOE. (*smiling*) Why not? The assistant editor of a weekly magazine—

MISS LESSON. When you're dead, somebody may start a boom in your novels.

JOE. There'll be a boom in Kaffirs first!

MISS LESSON. (*shaking hands*) Who knows? Well, good-bye and good luck! Famous or not, you're a fine man, and I'm proud to have known you.

JOE. (*simply*) Thank you, Miss Lesson.

MISS LESSON. Your father was a fine man, too—it's a pity his other son—well! (*she gives a meaning nod, and turns to MARTHA*)—good-bye, Mrs. Tremblett—and good luck to you, too.

Now please remain here, both of you—I want a few words with my little May, all to myself.

(She passes her arm around MAY, and goes to the door, JOE and MARTHA accompanying her. When she has gone MARTHA shouts down the stairs "A pleasant voyage! Come back soon!" to which MISS LESSON replies, "Who knows? Good-bye.")

(JOE and MARTHA come in, and shut the door.)

MARTHA. Oh, Joe, poor Lilian!

JOE. Don't let's speak about Lilian—

MARTHA. You will tell her?

JOE. *(going to his desk, and sitting)* Of course I shall tell her. It's the best thing, perhaps. But no more of that. We shall miss the dear old lady.

MARTHA. A queer notion at her age! And I was always hoping that she might do something for May!

JOE. *(surprised)* May?

MARTHA. Why, yes—she's so fond of her! and as May's nearly seventeen—

JOE. Heavens! Are you already thinking of marrying off my little May!

MARTHA. You don't want her to be single all her life, Joe?

JOE. All her life! The little thing's just beginning her life!

MARTHA. And a fine beginning too, having to go out as a typist!

JOE. *(stoutly)* It does no woman harm to have

to earn her own living. That makes her independent—if she marries then, she marries from choice, and not from necessity.

MARTHA. Oh, theory's all very fine.

JOE. (*patting her hand*) Come, old girl, don't grizzle! And it was your own idea, wasn't it? It was you who suggested it! See now, if you're good, I'll take you to look at your diamonds this afternoon—

MARTHA. (*leaning over to him, laughing*) In Tiffany's shop-window!

JOE. Haven't we agreed to regard that shop-window as our safe—and don't they belong to you because we imagine they do—and haven't Tiffany's all the trouble of looking after them, and dusting them, and keeping off the burglars? And as you'd hate to *wear* diamonds, being of a simple mind—

MARTHA. Try me!

JOE. It's ever so much more comfortable having them there, in the shop-window. (*with a sudden change of voice*) Martha! I've some good news.

MARTHA. Good news, Joe?

JOE. Handisyde called me into his room this morning, told me he was very satisfied with me, made my appointment permanent, and raised my salary fifty pounds a year.

MARTHA. Oh! I'm glad—(*bending to him*)—but permanent, Joe!

JOE. (*nodding*) It means we shall have no more anxiety as regards the future.

MARTHA. (*with her arm on his shoulder*) But your dreams, your ambitions, the books you were to write—

JOE. I don't give one damn for the lot—not one solitary Prussian damn! I've the best wife in the world—

MARTHA. Dear Joe!

JOE. And the best children in the world—and my dreams and ambitions can go hang themselves on the first rusty nail in the nearest asylum! Martha, they've made my increase of salary retrospective—

MARTHA. (*laughing*) I've met that word, I'm sure, but I don't think I was introduced.

JOE. It means I shall get twelve pounds ten extra this quarter, in a lump sum—

MARTHA. Ah!

JOE. And *that* means a new dress for you and May, and a theatre for us all—

MARTHA. (*turning to him*) And for you—?

JOE. For me? I'll tell you. I'll have a pound of the best tobacco to be got for love or money! Give me a kiss, old girl!

(*He throws his arms around her and kisses her boisterously. The door bursts open, and MAY rushes in, with LORD CARDEW (WALTER). A handsome, rather grave, man, five or six years younger than JOE, clean-shaven, with a strong, dogged face. JOE and MARTHA rise quickly, and go towards him.*)

MAY. Father, father—Lord Cardew!

WALTER. Joe!

(They shake hands.)

WALTER. How are you, Mrs. Tremblett? You've heard the news, May tells me.

MARTHA. Yes—and we're so sorry! Why, you've been away nearly a year—and now you're off again!

WALTER. Yes, I'm a restless spirit.

MAY. Where have you been, Lord Cardew?

WALTER. Tarpon-fishing—and climbing mountains—

MAY. Oh! how splendid! I would so love—

MARTHA. *(patting MAY on the shoulder)* Come, May—let's leave them. *(to WALTER)* You'd like a word with Joe, I know.

MAY. I'll see you before you go, Lord Cardew—shan't I?

WALTER. Oh yes, of course—I'll come down and say good-bye.

(MARTHA and MAY go—MAY looking back.)

JOE. So you're off to Canada?

WALTER. Yes. I suppose it must sound pretty foolish?

JOE. I don't know. How long have you been back?

WALTER. Three weeks, that's all.

JOE. And you're tired of town already?

WALTER. Yes—I'm always tired of town. And

I'm tired of tarpon fishing and climbing mountains, and generally of killing time. When you come to think of it, I'm thirty-two—and I'd like to *do* something. I'm sick of hanging around. One's hands are tied over here.

JOE. Yes.

WALTER. So we're going, Joe—the old aunt and I. We've booked our passage as Susan Lesson and Walter Dalmon—we'll drop the Honourable and we'll drop the Earl. I ought to have come to you before, but I've had all my affairs to settle.

JOE. Of course.

WALTER. (*rolling his gloves into a ball*) We've known each other a good long time, haven't we? It's a queer thing—your people stewards of the property, father to son, for more than two hundred years—and now no Tremblett at Cardew Towers—and soon no Dalmon either!

JOE. These things happen.

WALTER. It would have been quite a blow to your father, wouldn't it?

JOE. Dear old man—yes! (*he takes up a small framed photograph that stands on his table, and looks at it*) How proud he was of you all! Well, what do you mean to do with the place?

WALTER. Let it, if I can—but that's not easy—There are some people wanting to buy—but I won't sell.

JOE. You won't? (*he puts down the photograph*)

WALTER. Hang it, no! The place has been in

our family so long! Do you know, I've an idea your brother wants it?

JOE. (*surprised*) Willie?

WALTER. (*leaning forward*) They're his solicitors, I fancy—I'm pretty sure. I saw the man and asked him point-blank—was he acting for Mr. Tremblett? He denied it, of course—but I could see he was lying. Why should *he* want the Towers?

JOE. I can't imagine.

WALTER. He hasn't told you?

JOE. I see him once every year or so.

WALTER. He would like to be Lord of the Manor, perhaps, where he used to play in the kitchen.

(JOE *laughs*.)

(*with sudden recollection*) I beg pardon, Joe!
(*he pats JOE on knee*)

JOE. (*cheerfully*) Not at all. It was a beautiful kitchen. But Willie's not sentimental.

WALTER. (*still playing with his gloves*) No. It's probably only another way of showing his hatred for me.

JOE. (*quietly*) Why should he hate you?

WALTER. (*looking up*) Hasn't he married the woman I love? . . . That's reason enough, I suppose. (*he rises and paces the room. There is silence for a moment. JOE, who has filled and lit his pipe, looks quietly at him*) Have you seen her lately, Joe?

JOE. I manage to go there every week—when Willie's out.

WALTER. He doesn't treat her any better?

JOE. Lilian rarely mentions him—but of course he hasn't changed. She's very wise—she makes the best of things.

WALTER. How's she looking?

JOE. Just the same. And she never complains. Oh, she's brave!

WALTER. (*turning to him*) Does she speak of me?

JOE. (*speaking rather clumsily, and somewhat unwillingly*) . . . We do . . . speak of you sometimes, Walter . . .

WALTER. Has she got over the little boy's death?

JOE. It's more than two years ago—

WALTER. He was all she had in the world—her one child. It wasn't a pretty baby—but—how she loved it!

JOE. Yes. Poor Lilian!

WALTER. I've not seen her since then, Joe—not had a line from her——

JOE. Willie made her promise—

WALTER. That has always been such a mystery to me! I used to call on her At Home days, and listen to Company Promoters' wives talking scandal and shares. I've not been alone with her, since she was married. Then why?

JOE. My dear Walter, when he forbade you the house, I asked him the reason. He merely chuckled. That's all the answer I got.

WALTER. He can't have been jealous. A man who treats his wife like that can't love her.

JOE. (*thoughtfully, leaning back in his chair, and watching the smoke, as it curls into the air*) The baby's death made a great difference to him. He adored the child.

WALTER. And since then, of course—he's worse?

JOE. He hasn't improved.

WALTER. I often think, Joe, that you, as the elder brother—

JOE. (*with a shrug*) I've no more influence over Willie than a fly that crawls over his desk. I've no money—and money's the one thing he cares for, or values. It has become a disease, like drink or opium. There's nothing in common between us. If it weren't for his wife, I'd never go near his house.

WALTER. She doesn't come here?

JOE. No. He won't let her.

WALTER. Why?

JOE. I've told you—he gives no reasons.

WALTER. And she obeys?

JOE. What can she do against Willie?

WALTER. And she's chained to that man till one of them dies! Isn't it monstrous?

JOE. It's life.

WALTER. (*nodding, and turning away*) Life—yes. And her father, the old Dean, who preached the beautiful sermons that made all the ladies weep—he was life, too, wasn't he? He sold Lilian to Master Willie——

JOE. Willie offered to pay his debts.

WALTER. Yes—and I couldn't! How he pushed up his spectacles and ruffled his silvery hair, when I

asked him for Lilian! He had other views, he said—other views. We had loved each other, I told him, since we were children——

JOE. No good dwelling on the past, Walter——

WALTER. (*with sudden fierceness*) No good! Ah! but I do!—I do—and I hope there's some warm corner in Hell, from which the old Dean may see how his daughter has prospered!

JOE. (*puffing quietly at his pipe*) That's a question for the theologians. Though Hell's rather out of date.

WALTER. She obeyed her father—now she obeys her husband——

JOE. Yes. Some women are like that.

WALTER. I was a younger son then. I hope the old Dean knows I've come into the title.

JOE. They say the Devil has a sense of humour—he may have told him.

(*There is again silence for a moment. Then WALTER rises, and goes to JOE.*)

WALTER. You'll stand by her, Joe?

JOE. Always.

WALTER. Tell her I'm going—but that I haven't changed—and *shall* never change—that I'm there, when she wants me—and that I'm going away, because I can't endure living in the same city, and not seeing her. Tell her that I—that I—but she knows! I won't write to her—she and I—have no need of letters. ∴ Here's my address in Canada—don't lose it.

(He hands JOE an envelope, which JOE puts in a wallet which he takes from a drawer of the table.)

I shall hear from you?

JOE. Yes.

WALTER. I shouldn't go, if you weren't here. But I can trust you—I can, Joe, can't I?

JOE. You can.

WALTER. And—in case of necessity—if he made things too—hard—for her—you'd intervene?

JOE. Don't let's exaggerate. He's merely the ordinary kind of domestic bully—there are lots like him.

WALTER. At least most men care for their wife!

JOE. He prefers money. But even then he's not unique.

WALTER. Not unique—no. But there's something wrong, somewhere.

JOE. The world wants putting right, Walter—but we can't do it.

WALTER. No—we just shrug our shoulders and say "Poor Lilian"—Well, I must be going. Good-bye, Joe!

JOE. I shall be at the Station to-morrow.

WALTER. Don't, if you're busy. And stop here—I'll say good-bye to the children.

(As they join hands, the door opens and WILLIAM TREMBLETT comes in. He stops awkwardly on seeing WALTER)

JOE. Willie!

WILLIE. (*mumbling as he moves away*) Your fool of a servant said you were alone.

(WALTER looks at him quietly, then deliberately turns his back.)

WALTER. (*to JOE*) Good-bye! (*going*)

JOE. (*as he accompanies him to the door*) I shall be at the station, Walter!

(WALTER goes.)

(JOE turns to WILLIE, who has been contemplatively watching WALTER'S departure. WILLIE is a small man, with a hard, cold face, light blue eyes, and a voice that is remarkably soft and melodious. At present there is a look of considerable perplexity on him, as he stands tapping a snuff-box that he has produced from his pocket.)

JOE. Well?

WILLIE. Strange I should meet the lordling, wasn't it? What was he saying good-bye for, with such emphasis?

JOE. He's going to Canada.

WILLIE. (*with sudden violence*) The deuce he is! When?

JOE. To-morrow.

WILLIE. (*Staggered*) To-morrow! (*wildly*) When does he start? What time?

JOE. In the afternoon. Do you want to see him off, too?

WILLIE. (*With a great sigh of relief*) In the afternoon—ah! (*his whole manner changes—he becomes exceedingly genial, and offers his snuff-box*) Have a pinch?

JOE. Heavens—no! Why do you take that beastly—stuff?

WILLIE. So professional! Old fashioned family solicitor—eh? Besides, gives you time to think. (*he helps himself to a pinch*) Some men cultivate a stammer—I take snuff.

JOE. Well—you haven't come here to tell me that?

WILLIE. Your welcome's not particularly cordial, Joe—is it now?

JOE. Are you bringing out some new swindle, or reconstructing one of the old? I've no financial influence—if I had, you know what I'd say about you.

WILLIE. (*Chuckling, as he stands with his back to the fire*) Still so severe on the poor Company Promoter! Besides, I don't promote—I only advise. . . . Well, how are things going with you? Getting on, eh?

JOE. I've had a rise. My salary now is three hundred and fifty a year.

WILLIE. You don't say so! As much as that! Wonderful profession, literature!

JOE. What are you worth, Willie? Fifty thousand—or a hundred thousand—or what?

WILLIE. Oh, nothing like that, Joe—nothing like it! I wish it were! But I've quite a nice little pile.

JOE. What good does it do you?

WILLIE. Power. Money buys—and the world has a lot to sell.

JOE. What sickens me most is that people who know you are rich, ask me, almost enviously, whether I am your brother.

WILLIE. (*chuckling*) Shocking, isn't it? But don't let that worry you! You've your ideals, and I mine. You like fame, and I money. We're both rather fools, aren't we? Everyone's a bit of a fool. So there you are. Now let's talk.

JOE. Go on.

WILLIE. I suppose you'll let me sit down?

JOE. Why not?

WILLIE. Thanks. May I dislodge this—master-piece? (*he removes a pile of manuscripts from a chair, throws it on the table and sits; then, bending forward, his voice becoming sharp and incisive*) Would you like to earn five thousand pounds?

JOE. (*staring*) Five thousand pounds?

WILLIE. Yes. Would you?

JOE. Honestly?

WILLIE. Quite.

JOE. How?

WILLIE. It will take you half-an-hour. Will you?

JOE. What have I to do?

WILLIE. (*sullenly*) Use your influence on an obstinate woman.

JOE. Lilian?

WILLIE. (*nodding*) Lilian? Yes.

JOE. And you'll pay me five thousand for that?

WILLIE. If you succeed—yes, I will.

JOE. (*scornfully, after a moment's pause*) What dirty scheme have you on foot now, Master Willie? It must be pretty bad if poor Lilian dares to refuse!

WILLIE. (*snorting*) Bad! And poor Lilian, of course! It's always poor Lilian!

JOE. (*facing him*) You've hammered obedience into her—

WILLIE. Have I! When I tell you that she refuses.

JOE. Why? What is it?

WILLIE. (*impressively*) Joe, I want to buy a property that belongs to the man who went out just now—

JOE. Cardew Towers! Ah! Then it *was* you!

WILLIE. (*biting his nails*) He suspected?

JOE. He thought they were your solicitors.

WILLIE. (*after a moment's reflection*) Well, so much the better! Joe, fifteen thousand acres go with the Towers, and there's coal on the land.

JOE. Ah! That's it?

WILLIE. (*eagerly*) Yes: I've had secret information—no one knows. It's one of the finest coal-fields in the kingdom! I've offered a handsome figure—Cardew, the ass, won't sell.

JOE. So he told me.

WILLIE. I've offered above market value—he refuses—definitely.

JOE. Well?

WILLIE. (*doggedly*) So I want Lilian to go and ask him.

JOE. (*pushing back his chair and staring at him*) You—want—*Lilian* to go and ask him?

WILLIE. (*pettishly*) Is that so wonderful? I do. He would not refuse *her*.

JOE. You think not—eh?

WILLIE. (*sourly*) Cardew loves her, doesn't he?—Curse him, isn't he the kind of eternal lover, waiting for them both to die to ride off together on a broomstick?

JOE. Is that why you forbade him the house?

WILLIE. . . I didn't know then that there was coal on his land. . .

JOE. Of course. That makes a difference.

WILLIE. Besides, I had stood it quite long enough——

JOE. Stood it—stood what? They had scarcely seen each other since you—bought her——

WILLIE. (*fiercely*) Bought her! If I did, let me tell you I made a precious bad bargain!

JOE. You can't expect all your investments to turn out well.

WILLIE. Oh! of course, it's so easy for *you*! Why did I marry her, do you think, or buy her, as you call it? Was it such a catch to be the son-in-law of that bankrupt old humbug, the Dean?

JOE. She told you about Walter——

WILLIE. I believed it was all boy and girl nonsense. Well—it . . . wasn't. (*he turns on JOE and speaks with passion*) Do you know what it

means to be married to—to live with—a woman who—*who—ah well, never mind all that!* I've swallowed my pill—but—it took some swallowing! And how would *you* have liked to have him— hanging around?

JOE. And yet you want her to go to him now!

WILLIE. (*doggedly*) Yes. I do.

JOE. Although——

WILLIE. Don't you worry yourself. I know what I'm doing.

JOE. Because of the money?

WILLIE. The money. Precisely. Let's have no highfalutin'!

JOE. You told me just now——

WILLIE. (*wildly*) It's the only way, I tell you! —Besides, he's going to Canada—and let's hope he'll stop there. And we know Lilian, don't we? What a fuss, what a fuss! Cardew's staying with that mad old aunt of his—and she's Lilian's god-mother——

JOE. She hasn't seen Lilian since her marriage to you——

WILLIE. What has that to do with it? I've put the whole matter before Lilian——

JOE. Have you mentioned the coal?

WILLIE. (*sarling*) Is it likely? But I've told her she'd be rendering me a very great service. And I promised her an allowance——

JOE. You've been keeping her pretty close——

WILLIE. Close! She's the kind of woman who'd give all she had to the first beggar who asked her!

JOE. Hard on you, that.

WILLIE. She refuses.—No reasons—she won't!
When I argue—tears!

JOE. I see.

WILLIE. Very well then—that's where I want you
—to earn your five thousand pounds.

JOE. The pay's good.

WILLIE. I'll put it in writing if you like—though
I think you can trust my word——

JOE. (*puffing at his pipe, as he stares hard at Willie*) Yes. That's your one quality—and it's
wonderful enough, too——

WILLIE. (*eagerly.*) She'll listen to *you*—she be-
lieves in *you*—she'll do what you tell her. I've
drawn up a deed for her to take to him—and when
she brings that back, *signed*, I'll give you five thou-
sand pounds.

JOE. (*laying down his pipe*) I've never had
much respect for you, Willie——

WILLIE. Hang your respect! Who cares?

JOE. But this thing is so contemptible——

WILLIE. Oh! do drop those moral maxims of
yours, for once! They've done a great deal for you,
haven't they? They bring you three hundred a year!

JOE. Three hundred and fifty. Let's be accurate.

WILLIE. Which means that you're practically a
pauper——

JOE. With clean hands.

WILLIE. And a stainless conscience, and the rest
of the flap-doodle! Well, what I ask you to do won't
hurt your conscience, or leave even a grease-spot on

it. And if it does, you'll find that five thousand pounds wipe off a lot of spots!

JOE. No doubt!

WILLIE. (*moving to the door*) Come round this afternoon. It's Lilian's At Home day—but I'll be there, and see you're alone with her. Make her write to Cardew that she'll call to-morrow—

JOE. (*with sudden violence*) Get out!

WILLIE. (*staring*) What? ? ?

JOE. I've told you to go. You're wasting your time—and isn't time money?

(WILLIE stares at JOE, in absolute amazement: the door opens and MARTHA comes in, looking anxious and worried.)

JOE. I won't try to explain. What's the use? (*he waves to the door*)

MARTHA. (*anxiously*) Joe——

WILLIE. (*triumphantly*) Ah! here's Martha! Martha, speak to this husband of yours, and drive some common-sense into him! I've offered to put five thousand pounds into his pocket—and yours—and you've heard him! (to JOE) Talk it over with Martha—(*going*) you can tell her everything (*he turns when he gets to the door*) I'll expect you this afternoon!

(*He goes, jauntily*)

JOE. (*With supreme disgust*) The brute!

MARTHA. Why, Joe—what has happened?

JOE. (*moving from her, and throwing himself into his chair at the table*) Oh, don't let's talk of it!

MARTHA. (*following him.*) Joe, Joe, you must tell me! Five thousand pounds he said—what for?

JOE. What for, what for? Good Heavens, I've not thought very highly of this brother of mine—but I never believed him to be quite as—low down—as this!

MARTHA. (*leaning over his shoulder*) Don't work yourself into a passion, Joe. Tell me.

JOE. He has discovered somehow that there's coal on Walter's land, and has been trying to buy. But Walter won't sell. So he wants Lilian to go and ask him——

MARTHA. (*quietly*) Well?

JOE. (*staring amazedly at her*) “Well!” Did you hear what I said? That he wants Lilian to go to Walter——

MARTHA. There's nothing so terrible in that, Joe.

JOE. (*more and more bewildered*) Nothing so terrible! *You* say this! When he admits himself that they're in love with each other?

MARTHA. Lilian's not a young girl—and all that's so long ago! Every woman has a romance in her life—this is Lilian's.

JOE. Ah!—perhaps *you've* one too!

MARTHA. (*patting his hand*) I married *my* romance, Joe! But these five thousand pounds—what is it you have to do?

JOE. Lilian refuses to go—for the first time in

her life she has dared to stand up against him! So he imagines *I* will persuade her—I!

MARTHA. (*leans towards him*) You've great influence over her——

JOE. Yes—she trusts me. Poor thing, she has not many friends! She married my brother—I've done what I could. And he believes he can buy *me*, with his five thousand pounds!

MARTHA. Think what the money would mean, Joe!

JOE. (*eagerly*) That's the one thing in the world we *mustn't* think of! Why, apart from everything else, is it likely I'd help to deceive my friend Walter, who knows nothing about the coal?

MARTHA. That doesn't concern *us*, Joe; *you* are not going to buy the place. And *is* he such a friend of yours after all? You see him so seldom!

JOE. I've known him since he was a boy—and I like him.

MARTHA. (*pensively, as she leans her head on her hands*) His people treated your father very badly—he has never done anything for you. You remember, when you tried for that secretaryship—

JOE. I suppose he didn't think I was the man for it. And besides are we only to regard those people as friends who do things for us?

MARTHA. All I mean is, Joe, that we must not be quixotic. You've nothing to do with the coal, or Lord Cardew—you've merely to persuade Lilian—

JOE. (*scarcely believing his ears*) Merely! (*He*

looks sorrowfully at her) Don't say that you'd like me to do it!

MARTHA. (*with feeling*) Ah, Joe, Joe! (*She puts her arm around his neck, and kisses him.*) I don't like to do *anything* that would hurt you, or that you don't feel to be right! But this is a chance—a wonderful chance—the chance of our lifetime!

JOE. Because of the beastly money? Are *you* going to be like Willie, and put that above everything else in the world?

MARTHA. (*emphatically*) Not for myself—I don't care about myself—but we have our children to think of. That's our first duty, Joe. See there's our little May growing up—our beautiful little May—and she has to go to the city, and be in a stuffy office from nine till six—

JOE. Thousands of girls have to do it—

MARTHA. Because their parents can't help themselves, that's all! But is it a healthy existence, do you think, for a young girl? Our May's not very strong—she'll soon grow pale and anaemic—

JOE. (*unhappily*) Why *should* she?

MARTHA. Because she's growing, and should have lots of air, and exercise. Look at the post-office girls behind the counter—how thin and white they are—our May will be like that too!

JOE. You've never said these things before—it was your own idea that she should learn type-writing—

MARTHA. Because *then* we had no choice—then she *had* to earn her living! But, Joe, do you think

she likes it, the poor little thing? Do you realize how a girl craves, at that age, for a little brightness, a little joy, in her life? And you know how dearly she would have loved to go to College! And there are the others, too, growing up—we shall have soon to think of them. And, Joe, I've so often wanted to give May some mountain air—instead of our fortnight every year in a third-rate lodging in Hastings, we could take her to Switzerland, couldn't we—give her a real holiday, for once—

JOE. (*turning away and dropping his head*) This is the first time you have flung my poverty at me!

MARTHA. (*goes to him, eagerly, and lays her hand caressingly on his, with her arm round his neck*) Because it's the first time you've had a chance of escape from it! Oh Joe, Joe—I'd never advise a thing I believed to be wrong—but here—what harm could there be?

JOE. He forbade Walter the house—and now he wants her to—

MARTHA. Lilian would do it—for you! I can quite understand, of course, that it won't be—pleasant—but she'll do it—for you!

JOE. (*eyeing her grimly*) It only strikes you as unpleasant—nothing more?

MARTHA. (*away from him slightly*) Of course, nothing more! You men always exaggerate things so much! She will go to Lord Cardew—and I dare say she'll cry a little—and he'll be very sorrowful, and very gentle—and they'll bid each other good-bye

—he's going away, isn't he?—and we shall have five thousand pounds, which means all the world to us! Think Joe, another two hundred and fifty a year! (*she clasps her hands together*)

JOE. (*sarcastically*) Money doesn't bring in five per cent nowadays—

MARTHA. Willie told me he'd manage it for us—on a safe mortgage—

JOE. (*staring, turning sharply to her*) Willie! ! ! He told you! Ah! then he has been here, behind my back—

(*MARTHA hangs her head, in deep confusion*)

Martha, you've never kept things from me before!

MARTHA. (*bravely*) Well, it's true. He came early this morning when you were out, and told me. He wanted to offer five hundred—I found he would make an enormous profit, and screwed him up to five thousand. I said it was only right that we should share—

JOE. (*grimly*) Come in on the ground floor, is the technical expression—

MARTHA. Don't make fun of it, Joe,—this thing is too serious!—Of course, I understand exactly how Lilian feels—but I tell you there can be no possible harm in her going, and no possible harm in your using your influence. She'll be glad to help us, poor dear, and glad, in her heart, to see Lord Cardew again and bid him good-bye. (*She leans her head on JOE's shoulder*) Oh, I can quite understand her refusing to obey Willie—we women are like that,

you see—and it's only natural her not *wanting* to ask this favor. But tell her that it's for us—and she'll do it at once!

JOE. That's just what's so hateful—she'd do it—for us!

MARTHA. (*eagerly*) Joe, Joe—don't you see—that would *justify* it to her! They won't see each other again for so many years, the poor things—all their life, perhaps—don't you think she'll be *glad* to go? And if she *has* to sacrifice her pride a little—if *you* have—haven't we a duty to our children, and may we let *our* pride stand in the way? No, no, Joe—we mustn't—we mustn't!

(MAY comes running in.)

MAY. Mother, Sarah wants to know—(*she stops short*)

MARTHA. (*whispers to JOE*) See for yourself what it would mean to her. (*Crosses him and going to door—stays on the way to speak to MAY*) I'll go to her, dear. You stay here, and talk to father. He's a bit worried, May.

(MARTHA kisses her and goes, quickly.)

MAY. (*goes to JOE.*) You worried, daddy? (*She throws her arm round his neck—he draws her close to him*)

JOE. (*wistfully*) May! My little May!

MAY. What is it, daddy? Tell me!

JOE. Does it hurt you so much being poor, May?

MAY. (*stoutly*) Not one—little—bit! Wouldn't I rather be your daughter than that of the richest man in the world!

JOE. Then you don't mind going to the City?

MAY. (*getting on JOE's knee*) Mind! Why should I! Oh! I'll be so proud to bring home a few shillings to mother every week!

JOE. (*with a groan*) My poor little girl! But, May . . . suppose, suppose . . . I had—money—left me—suppose—

MAY. (*her eyes sparkling*) Daddy!

JOE. Suppose instead of going—to the—City—you could go to—College—

MAY. (*wild with excitement*) Oh, daddy, daddy! it's too good to be true! (*she kisses him again and again*) I always knew something would happen! Oh! how I've hated the thought of the office! And I *hate* typewriting, Daddy—I do, I hate it! And college—oh! lovely, lovely! Father, father dear! (*she hugs him again*) Mother! (*she jumps up*) where's mother? Oh! I must kiss her too! Mother!

(*She rushes out of the room*)

Mother! (*As she runs down the stairs, her voice is heard calling*) Mother! Mother!

(*JOE remains seated, staring at the fire, and sinks his head on his chest as the curtain slowly falls*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

(The drawing-room at WILLIE TREMBLETT's house in Bryanston Square. Everything in the room is very elaborate, very expensive, and very ugly, except the pictures, which have evidently been bought with a keen eye to an investment, and will certainly fetch big prices at Christie's when they come under the hammer. The general decorations and upholstery almost blatantly assert the fact that money has been no object. [LILIAN TREMBLETT is saying good-bye to MRS. BONHAM]: MRS. BARTER is seated, and eating bread-and-butter. LILIAN is a woman who may still be called beautiful, for all the settled melancholy that plays around her lips and eyes. She is twenty-eight, but looks older; her face is white and thin, and her hands almost unnaturally slender and delicate. She is dressed with a studied simplicity, that conflicts curiously with the rich and rather violent costumes worn by her visitors, who both belong to an ordinary and rather unattractive type of self-assertive, hard-featured woman.)

MRS. BONHAM. Yes, I *must* go, dear Mrs. Tremblett—I've so many calls to pay! Good-bye!

LILIAN. Good-bye, Mrs. Bonham—

MRS. BONHAM. (*to* MRS. BARTER) Good-bye, Clara—come and see me soon.

MRS. BARTER. Oh yes—good-bye, Maudie—love to the children, and Harold.

(MRS. BARTER *and* MRS. BONHAM *kiss each other affectionately.*)

(MRS. BONHAM *goes.*)

MRS. BARTER. (*waiting till* MRS. BONHAM *is well out of earshot—laughing*) They're up a tree, you know.

LILIAN. (*going back to her seat by the tea-table*) What! the Bonhams!

MRS. BARTER. (*nodding*) He came to my husband yesterday—he's broke—wanted to borrow some money—

LILIAN. (*sits*) Oh, I'm sorry!

MRS. BARTER. (*with a chuckle*) So was Mr. Barter! He regretted it was against his principles—but he gave some excellent *advice*. They've been shockingly extravagant!

LILLIAN. Indeed?

MRS. BARTER. See how she dresses, at her time of life! And they keep *five* servants! He has been plunging, you know. They'll be sold up.

LILIAN. Poor things!

MRS. BARTER. Well, it serves her right, doesn't it? That motor car she has been talking about so much—it'll be a penny 'bus now.

LILIAN. I thought you were so fond of her?

MRS. BARTER. Of Maudie? Why, so I am! She's

one of my very best friends—but one can't be blind to her faults, though—can one?

(A moment's silence.)

(HARRIS, the manservant, announces MRS. MORPHITT, a stout, over-dressed person, on whom are so many bangles, chains and bracelets that, when she walks, she jingles like a Swiss mule.)

MRS. MORPHITT. How do you do, Mrs. Tremblett? Ah, Clara, I thought I should find you here. *(She shakes hands with LILIAN, then comes down and embraces MRS. BARTER)*

LILIAN. Have you had tea, Mrs. Morphitt?

MRS. MORPHITT. *(sitting in arm-chair)* Well, I have—but, do you know, I don't mind taking some more. I've been at the Hamlins to condole—and the tea was so weak!

MRS. BARTER. *(sitting by her friend)* Ah, of course—old Mrs. Waters died yesterday, didn't she?

(LILIAN hands MRS. MORPHITT a cup.)

—I must go too.

MRS. MORPHITT. It was time she did die! She must have been nearly ninety! And what do you think her last words were?

MRS. BARTER. Oh, something spiteful!

MRS. MORPHITT. She sent for her daughter—you know *(nodding to LILIAN)* that long, thin, pale Matilda, who has nursed her these twenty years—and

she whispered—oh, most solemnly! “*Never call a black suit when you’re dealer!*”

(MRS. BARTER *laughs.*)

—And with that she died!

MRS. BARTER. How funny! (*to LILIAN*) But, all the same, she was right, don’t you think, Mrs. Tremblett?

LILIAN. I don’t play Bridge, you know.

MRS. BARTER. That is so eccentric of you! But how glad long Matilda must be the old lady’s gone!

LILIAN. (*making conversation*) Is it her sister who is married to that awful Mr. Hamlin?

MRS. MORPHITT. (*holding up her fat hands*) Mrs. Tremblett, oh, *dear* Mrs. Tremblett, you mustn’t call him *that!* Why, he’s worth at least a million!

MRS. BARTER. At least!

MRS. MORPHITT. His *manners*, of course, are not very good—but one forgives a great deal in the man who promoted the Great Patagonian Goldfields!

LILIAN. (*meekly*) I thought there had been such a scandal about that—

MRS. MORPHITT. (*with dignity*) Scandal? Oh no—surely scandal is scarcely the word!

MRS. BARTER. (*merrily*) The dear silly public came tumbling in—and they lost their money—and then of course they howled!

MRS. MORPHITT. But *that* was where Mr. Hamlin showed such immense cleverness! The prospectus was a masterpiece—wasn’t it, Clara?

(*She hands her tea-cup to MRS. BARTER, who puts it on the table behind her.*)

MRS. BARTER. (*with admiration*) My husband says it's a classic—that it ought to be framed. Why, there wasn't a single clause of the Companies' Acts that he hadn't respected!

MRS. MORPHITT. (*shaking, with laughter*) And yet—oh dear, it was really too funny! (*to LILIAN*) But we must give Mr. Tremblett some share of the credit. It was *he* who helped to draw up the prospectus—wasn't it?

LILIAN. (*shaking her head*) I don't know.

MRS. MORPHITT. I'm pretty sure. Oh, you may well be proud of your husband! When *he* has had a hand in the prospectus, one can *laugh* at the law! A *wonderful* man!

MRS. BARTER. Yes, that's the word—*wonderful*! (*to LILIAN*) It isn't *luck*, you know—one can't call it *luck*! He did pretty well out of it, too, did he not, Mrs. Tremblett?

LILIAN. He never speaks to me of his affairs.

MRS. BARTER. (*shaking her head at LILIAN*) Ah, my dear, I'm afraid they don't interest you as much as they should! My husband talks over everything with me.

MRS. MORPHITT. (*stolidly*) So does Mr. Morphitt! And I may say, if he had followed my advice, he would never have been in trouble over that Amalgamated Milk Canners' affair!

MRS. BARTER. (*Patting her hand affectionately*)

Dear Agatha! Still fretting over that! After all, he was only a *first-class* misdemeanant!

MRS. MORPHITT. Still, it's not pleasant for my boys, when they go to Eton, to be told that their father has been in prison—

MRS. BARTER. Dear Agatha, that can happen to anyone! And besides Holloway's scarcely a *prison*—is it, Mrs. Tremblett?

LILIAN. I really don't know—

MRS. MORPHITT. What I call so abominable is that they should allow shareholders to sit on a jury!

MRS. BARTER. Yes—it's wicked! Of course they're prejudiced!

MRS. MORPHITT. And Mr. Morphitt had just given a thousand pounds to Saint Samuel's, and been thanked by the Dean and Chapter! We were getting on so nicely!

MRS. BARTER. It's a year ago, dear Agatha! These things are forgotten so quickly!

MRS. MORPHITT. Of course—but still—would you believe it! They won't let my Henry stand for Parliament!

MRS. BARTER. (*staggered*) No—not possible!

MRS. MORPHITT. It's a fact, I assure you! He has approached *both* parties—he doesn't care *which* side he sits on—and they won't! And it has always been his ambition—and *mine*!

MRS. BARTER. Never mind, (*patting her hand*) Agatha dear! I suppose you've handsomer diamonds, and more expensive motorcars, than any woman in London!

MRS. MORPHITT. You dear thing, you're *always* so sweet!

(HARRIS comes in—announcing MISS LESSON.)

HARRIS. Miss Lesson.

(LILIAN springs up and goes eagerly to her.)

LILIAN. Oh, Miss Lesson, I'm so glad! You've come at last!

MISS LESSON. (*brusquely*) How are you, Lilian?

MRS. BARTER. (*rising—to MRS. MORPHITT*) That's the *Honourable* Miss Lesson!

MRS. MORPHITT. (*rising, open-mouthed*) Oh!

LILIAN. (*To MISS LESSON*) The first time you've been here! Oh, I can't tell you how pleased I am!

(*She and MISS LESSON stand for a moment, looking at each other. MRS. MORPHITT feels herself neglected, and coughs.*)

LILIAN. (*turning*) Let me introduce Mrs. Morphitt, Mrs. Barter—Miss Lesson.

MRS. BARTER. Delighted, I'm sure.

MRS. MORPHITT. (*bowing affably*) Charmed to meet you, Miss Lesson.

LILIAN. Will you have tea?

MISS LESSON. (*standing with her back to the fire*) No, thanks. Nasty stuff—never take it.

MRS. MORPHITT. (*sweetly*) I think I've met a relation of yours—The *Honourable* Wilfred Lesson—a most *charming* man.

MISS LESSON. Second cousin—rather a scamp—we're not proud of him. I've come across a relation of *yours*, I fancy—at least, the same name.

MRS. MORPHITT. Indeed?

MISS LESSON. (*over her shoulder*) Well, not in the flesh—but I sent a guinea, you know, to help put him in prison—

(LILIAN rises and moves eagerly towards her.)

MRS. MORPHITT. Oh!

MISS LESSON. And never did I invest a guinea more gladly.

LILIAN. (*whispering to MISS LESSON*) Hush! He's her husband!

MISS LESSON. (*tranquilly*) Ah—didn't know—should have told me—

MRS. MORPHITT. (*With immense dignity*) Miss Lesson, my husband was a victim to the most abominable injustice—

MISS LESSON. Think so? I had ten pounds in his Milk Cans myself—

MRS. MORPHITT. I am sorry for that, of course—but I am sure you will admit this was not a case for the Public Prosecutor to take up—

MISS LESSON. Quite agree. Case for policeman and nearest lamp post.

MRS. MORPHITT. (*aghast*) Madam!

MISS LESSON. Tell him so, with my compliments!

MRS. MORPHITT. (*goes majestically to LILIAN*)

Good-bye, Mrs. Tremblett! I did not think you would allow *me* to be insulted in your own house—

LILIAN. (*very distressed*). I'm sure Miss Lesson did not mean—

MISS LESSON. I did—every word of it! And if I were a newspaper man I'd put it in print.

MRS. MORPHITT. (*after a terrible look at MISS LESSON*) Come, Clara.

(*She walks out solemnly. MRS. BARTER waits till she has gone, then goes to LILIAN, chuckling with glee at her friend's discomfiture.*)

MRS. BARTER. Oh, Mrs. Tremblett, I'm afraid she'll never forgive you!

(*She hurries after MRS. MORPHITT.*)

MISS LESSON. (*discontentedly*) Nice friends you have, I must say!

LILIAN. Their husbands are business connections of Mr. Tremblett—they come every week. They're the only people I see.

MISS LESSON. Cheerful! But I'm sorry I lost my temper. Can't keep things back—blurt out the truth—suppose that's why I'm not popular! Expect you'll catch it for this?

LILIAN. Mr. Morphitt will probably complain to my husband—But I agree with every word you've said—and I'm glad you've said it—they're awful people!

(There is a moment's silence. Then MISS LESSON moves across the room, sits by LILIAN'S side, and takes her by the hand.)

MISS LESSON. My poor Lilian! What a brute you must have thought me, never to come near you, all these years.

LILIAN. It wasn't kind, Miss Lesson.

MISS LESSON. Well, perhaps it wasn't. But you were my god-daughter and I was fond of you. And I warned you I shouldn't, when you spoke to me about your marriage.

LILIAN. Yes.

MISS LESSON. I told you then I had no sympathy with daughters who were too dutiful—and I believe I added a word or two about your venerable father the Dean—

LILIAN. He's dead, Miss Lesson.

MISS LESSON. Yes, he's dead. I made a few remarks to him, too, at the time, that he didn't appreciate. . . . Well, Lilian, I've only called to-day to bid you good-bye.

LILIAN. *(surprised)* Good-bye?

MISS LESSON. *(nodding)* Walter and I are going to Canada.

LILIAN. What? On a visit?

MISS LESSON. No. For good.—Joe Tremblett knows, and of course he'd tell you—but I thought you'd rather hear it from me.

LILIAN. *(simply)* Thank you, Miss Lesson. *(She turns her head away, and for a moment there is silence)*

MISS LESSON. (*gently leaning to her*) Walter often speaks of you—more often than I like. . . . Oh, my child, what a hash you've made of your life!

LILIAN. (*sadly*) I couldn't help myself!

MISS LESSON. H'm—well—It's no good crying over spilt milk! Tell me, though—why do you allow that little brute of a husband of yours to bully you?

LILIAN. (*in feeble protest*) Miss Lesson—

MISS LESSON. (*stoutly*) I call him a brute, because he is a brute.—Don't know what sort of a wife I should have made—no one ever had the sense to ask me—but I could almost wish *I* were Mrs. William Tremblett—

LILIAN. What would you have me do! Oh, Miss Lesson, Miss Lesson—I suppose there are some women who are born to be unhappy—

MISS LESSON. Fudge. That's parson's talk. We're born to be happy, all of us.

LILIAN. Then I'm an exception.

MISS LESSON. Why do you stand it? let yourself be bullied—

LILIAN. He has a will of iron—One has to bend before it, or break.

MISS LESSON. I'd have broken a good many other things first!—Then you're not even mistress in your own house?

LILIAN. It's not my house—it's his.

MISS LESSON. (*discontentedly*) H'm!

LILIAN. Everything's his—I belong to him, with

the rest . . . Oh, things weren't so bad till my little boy died—Willie worshipped him—and I, at least, had my child. But ever since then he—he's not—I—I mean—I don't know! There are times when he has seemed sorry for me, and at first he tried—I could see that he tried—and he cared for me too, I believe. . . . But, I—oh, it has all been so awful!—As you see, I'm resigned.

MISS LESSON. That's a quality I don't admire, and never did.

LILIAN. What else would you have? Days come and go—one sits in one's corner—I do everything for peace. But, what is worse—and I've seen it grow in him, little by little, eat up, as it were, all that was good—I don't know what it is, I can't explain it—but it's as though the whole world were blotted out, and he saw only one thing—money!

MISS LESSON. Money—yes.

LILIAN. And with that, you know, a fearful belief in what money can buy. When my boy was ill, Willie called in a great doctor—a specialist—a man who was all thermometers and rules—and the doctor sent for two nurses, and gave them instructions I must be kept from my little son's bedside—I, his mother—and he cried for me, and they wouldn't let me go near him—I, who might have saved him!

MISS LESSON. My poor Lilian!

LILIAN. Who might have saved him—yes! . . . And here we sit, night after night, he plotting and planning and scheming—and wondering—Oh, I can see it!—that I don't care about the

money he makes—that I hate it, hate it! and the years roll on, and here we shall sit to the end. . . . Well, that's how it is. I try to make the best of things.

MISS LESSON. As long as you don't get like the women the novelists write of, who've a far-away look in their eyes—and are always misunderstood.

LILIAN. Oh, don't be afraid! I've told you I'm resigned. And if only he will leave *me* out of his schemes—

MISS LESSON. (*turning to her, with surprise*) You? What do you mean?

LILIAN. The last few days have been especially unhappy. Oh, never mind why—I think it has blown over. And I don't complain—you mustn't think I'm always lamenting. I've brought it on myself—I realize that. I see now that I shouldn't have allowed my father to govern me. But my mother had worshipped him so—and I promised her—

MISS LESSON. I know! I know! Your mother took a delight in sacrificing herself—and was so supremely unselfish that she sacrificed her daughter too!

LILIAN. What I regret most of all is that I seem to have spoiled Walter's life.

MISS LESSON. That's the penalty we have to pay for our acts of foolishness—someone else always suffer for them—However, I won't scold any more.—I'm very sorry for you, my poor Lilian! (*leaning over her—she kisses her affectionately, and is about*

to go, when WILLIE opens the door, comes in, and pauses on the threshold, in surprise at seeing MISS LESSON.)

WILLIE. (*with mocking deference*) Miss Lesson! this is indeed an honour.

MISS LESSON. (*eyeing him squarely*) Glad you appreciate it, Mr. Tremblett—I trust you are well?

WILLIE. Enjoying excellent health, thank you, Miss Lesson—excellent health!—You are going to Canada, I hear?

MISS LESSON. Yes, Mr. Tremblett—I am going to Canada.

WILLIE. Still devoted to art, and the Stock Exchange, Miss Lesson?

MISS LESSON. Yes, Mr. Tremblett, I paint pictures, which don't sell—and I buy shares—which don't pay dividends.

WILLIE. (*chuckling*) That is unfortunate, very.

MISS LESSON. Isn't it? If I were not going away, I should ask you to sit to me for your portrait.

WILLIE. (*Bowing*) An additional cause for my regretting your departure.

MISS LESSON. But I shall do it from memory—a fancy sketch—a little allegorical—

WILLIE. (*indifferent*) Indeed?

MISS LESSON. Yes! I shall paint you as Cupid, sitting on a cash box, with little angels behind you, flourishing prospectuses.—Early Italian style, you know.

WILLIE. (*biting his lip*) Such a pity no one ever *buys* your pictures.

MISS LESSON. Oh, this one will find a buyer—I'm sure—among your—clients! Good-bye, Lillian—

(LILIAN rises, and goes to her.)

—I must be off—good-bye, my child— . . .
(She kisses LILIAN affectionately, and almost tenderly—then turns and faces WILLIE) (Cheerfully)
Good-bye, Mr. Tremblett.

WILLIE. (sourly, not stirring) Good-bye.

(MISS LESSON goes. LILIAN is about to follow her—
WILLIE steps forward.)

WILLIE. (harshly) Stay here.

LILIAN. I want to—

WILLIE. I have told you to stay here! The old harridan has been as offensive as she could; she can find her own way to the door.

LILIAN. (after a moment's pause) Very well.
(She returns to her seat. WILLIE faces her grimly, his hands tucked behind his back.)

WILLIE. You've been airing your grievances, eh? Telling her what a brute I am, and so forth?

LILIAN. (in low tones) I've told her I'm very unhappy.

WILLIE. (with a sneer) Of course!—It's extraordinary how fond you are of snivelling!

(LILIAN rises.)

—Where are you going?

LILIAN. To my room.

WILLIE. You will be good enough to remain with me.

(He gets between her and the door—LILIAN sinks on to the sofa.)

You're very pleased with yourself, I suppose?

LILIAN. *(despairingly)* I have great cause to be pleased.

WILLIE. Why not? You've opposed your husband—refused to obey him.

LILIAN. *(turning and facing him boldly)* Yes, I have refused! And it is useless—useless—useless—to re-open the matter!

WILLIE. *(Chuckling)* Hoity-toity! Quite another Ajax, defying the lightning! *(he brings out his snuff-box, which he taps—eyeing her keenly)* The old cat will have told you, I suppose, that our Romeo is going to Canada?

(LILIAN is silent and turns her head away.)

(Harshly) Answer me!

LILIAN. *(seated)* Miss Lesson informed me that she and Lord Cardew were leaving.

WILLIE. And doesn't our little heart leap when we know that the man we love intends to desert us?

LILIAN. *(rises and faces him with a sudden violent movement)* I will not endure this!

WILLIE. *(chuckling)* The Honourable Susan has been advising her little lamb to show its teeth!

LILIAN. *(almost in a wail, as she turns from him)*

What pleasure can it give you to torture me, day after day!

WILLIE. (*taking a pinch of snuff*) Torture, torture! Why *do* you use such ridiculous words? I was merely putting an every-day question.

LILIAN. Yes, you *have* put it, day after day! Mention Lord Cardew to me again—I'll leave you!

WILLIE. Threatened men live long.

LILIAN. (*despairingly*) I'll leave you, I will! I can't bear it!

WILLIE. You can have your dowry, you know, for the asking. (*moving up to her*) It shall be sent on a post-card.

LILIAN. Yes—I have no money—and you have driven away all my friends—But I'd rather be in the workhouse—

WILLIE. There's a very fine one in the Marylebone Road—all the latest improvements—it's lucky that should be our parish.

(*LILIAN moves swiftly to the door.*)

(*With sudden fierceness*) Listen, you! I don't want any of your airs and graces—stay here, I tell you!

LILIAN. I will not—I will not!

(*She rushes out of the room.*)

(*WILLIE takes a step forward—then pauses, shrugs his shoulders, taps at his snuff-box, and stands irresolute for a moment.*)

(HARRIS brings in JOE, who hands his hat to HARRIS and goes to the fireplace.)

WILLIE. Ah, brother Joe! (to HARRIS) Mrs. Tremblett has just gone to her room. Tell her my brother is here, and wishes to see her. And if any one comes to-day, Mrs. Tremblett is out. You understand?

HARRIS. This is her At Home day, sir?

WILLIE. (*stamping his foot*) Blockhead! You heard what I said?

(HARRIS goes without a word.)

JOE. This would seem to be one of your amiable days, Master Willie. What a little sunbeam you are!

WILLIE. (*growling*) H'm. Never mind! I've an elder brother who monopolises all the virtues. None left for me!

JOE. (*putting some woodlogs on the fire*) You'll excuse the liberty?

WILLIE. Feel cold, eh? I thought that great heart of yours always kept you warm. (*with a sudden change of voice*) Look here, you'll not find her in a very good mood—

JOE. (*at fire—Turning to him*) You've been having another go at her, eh? Another turn of the screw?

WILLIE. (*sullenly*) That gambling old dauber Miss Lesson has been here—they've been having a rare fling at me, between them—I can tell you! She

has heard from Miss Lesson about their going away—*(with sudden passion)* I'd give something handsome if that ship went down! I would!

JOE. That's very sweet of you! Walter's done you no harm—that I know of——

WILLIE. *(snarling)* All right—never you mind—it's no business of yours! . . . See here, I've prepared her.

JOE. Thoughtful of you—very. You don't propose to stay here?

WILLIE. Oh no—I shall leave you! *(he moves to the door. Then, with a chuckle, over his shoulder)* I thought you'd come, brother Joe! Money! Oh, some of us sneer at it—but we're all precious glad to have it!

JOE. *(Looking quietly at him)* I frequently blame myself, Willie, for not having thrashed you more often when we were boys——

WILLIE. *(with a wave of the hand)* You've no sense of humour, Joe—no sense of humour—and that's such a pity!

JOE. *(sternly)* I'm here—and I'm ashamed enough to be here——

WILLIE. The first sensible thing you've done all your life!

JOE. Say much more in that strain and I'll leave you, and not wait for Lilian!

(WILLIE turns away, with a shrug.)

WILLIE. Oh I'll go! Now, mind you be——

JOE. Thank you. I don't want your advice.

(With another shrug, WILLIE goes and closes the door. JOE waits patiently, staring straight before him. After a minute or two LILIAN comes running into the room, and goes to JOE with outstretched hands)

LILIAN. Joe, dear Joe—Oh, I'm glad to see you!

JOE. You've been crying? (he holds her hand in his and looks closely at her)

LILIAN. Yes—but never mind about that! Does he know you're here?

(JOE nods: she goes close to him and speaks almost in a whisper) Miss Lesson called, Joe—it was kind of her, wasn't it?—she came to tell me—

JOE. About their going?

LILIAN. Yes. . . . Oh, Joe, you'll never believe what Willie has been wanting me to do!

JOE. (awkwardly) I know—I've seen him. He came to my house this morning.

LILIAN. Imagine it! Can you imagine it? Joe, why is he so anxious to buy the place?

JOE. (embarrassed) Why?

LILIAN. Yes—why? Do you know?

JOE. Yes

LILIAN. (wistfully) You'd rather not tell me?

JOE. (clearing his throat) It would be breaking a confidence.

LILIAN. Think of his asking me to go to Walter

—*me*—to beg such a favor of him! *Can* you understand it?

JOE. He—he—is very keen on—on——

LILIAN. He knows, of course, that Walter would do it—that he wouldn't refuse me.

JOE. That's just it.

LILIAN. (*struck by something in his voice*) Joe! You don't want me to go?

JOE. (*hesitating, not knowing what to say*) Lilian——

LILIAN. (*amazed*) You do?

JOE. (*doggedly*) Yes.

LILIAN. What? (*she stares blankly at him*) You?

JOE. That's what I've come for—that's why he has left us alone.

LILIAN. (*scarcely believing her ears*) Joe! (*she moves instinctively from him*)

JOE. (*with a great effort*) Sit down, Lilian!—let us—let us—discuss this—He promised you an allowance—if Walter signed the deed?

LILIAN. (*still staring wonderingly at him*) Yes.

JOE. That would be useful?

LILIAN. I've had to go to him for every penny——

JOE. Well, that would be altered now. And Willie keeps his word, we know that.

LILIAN. (*moving towards him*) Is it you, you—who advise me to do this disgraceful thing, because of the money?

JOE. (*struggling bitterly with himself*) After all—would it be so disgraceful, Lilian?

LILIAN. (*with deep reproach*) Joe!

JOE. (*doggedly, avoiding her eyes*) You and Walter are old friends——

LILIAN. (*quietly*) We love each other. Even *he* knows that.

JOE. (*with a gesture, rising, and moving from her*) You're married—you're not a young girl. You and he are old friends, nothing more. And see now—why won't Walter sell the place? For sentimental reasons, isn't it? It's sentiment with him—he told me himself—when he dies the property goes to a distant cousin. So, after all! And if he lets Willie have it, he'll be rendering *you* a very great service. He'll surely be glad to do that!

LILIAN. (*eyeing him steadily*) Do you realize what it would cost me to ask such a favor? I have spoiled Walter's life—I want him to forget me—

JOE. You would see him for half an hour——

LILIAN. I should be asking this of him, in the name of our love! (*with a gesture of despair*) Joe, Joe—I should never have thought this—of you!

JOE. (*turning away, unhappily*) No. I shouldn't either.

LILIAN. You who know what my life has been! I felt sure of *you*! (*She leans her face on her hands*)

JOE. (*walking away and speaking over his shoulder, desperately*) Willie has promised me five thousand pounds, if he gets the estate.

LILIAN. (*looking up, startled*) He has promised *you* five thousand pounds?

JOE. Yes.

LILIAN. Why?

JOE. There's coal on the land—he would make an enormous profit——

LILIAN. So *that's* the reason?

JOE. Yes. Now you know.

LILIAN. (*sorrowfully*) And do you want the money so badly?

JOE. It would make all the difference to me. My little May needn't go as a typewriter—I could send her to college——

LILIAN. I see. I'm sorry, but I can't do it, Joe.

JOE. You could tell him about the coal—and me. Of course he doesn't know.

LILIAN. And ask him to sell the place much under its value? That would be making the favor greater still?

JOE. Yes. I've made a hash of it. I hadn't intended——

LILIAN. (*softly*) You couldn't help yourself, Joe.

JOE. Besides, now of course he won't do it——

LILIAN. He would, if *I* asked him! But what could I offer in return?

JOE. (*fidgitting*) He would be glad to have helped you.

LILIAN. How much would it cost him?

JOE. We needn't go into figures.

LILIAN. You understand that I love him?

JOE. You and he are old friends——

LILIAN. That I love him to-day as I loved him five years ago?

JOE. (*unhappily, turning from her*) Lilian, Lilian—it's not a nice business! I'm not proud of being here.

LILIAN. (*going to him, and laying a hand on his arm*) Martha sent you?

JOE. Martha's a good woman, Lilian.

LILIAN. *She* wants me to go?

JOE. Martha would advise nothing that wasn't right——

LILIAN. (*wistfully*) She has her children who love her——

JOE. She said you would do this for us——

LILIAN. (*suddenly*) Yes, I *will* do it—for you.

JOE. Lilian!

LILIAN. You have stood by me all these years—you have been my one friend—*You* have a right to ask this of me.

JOE. (*eagerly*) It means a tremendous deal to me—but I wouldn't ask it—God knows I wouldn't—if I thought there was really anything——

LILIAN. (*still in the same quiet tone*) No.

JOE. And as you'll tell him about the coal—and the money——

LILIAN. Yes.

JOE. Besides, he'll be away for years—perhaps he'll never come back——

LILIAN. (*With a start*) Perhaps he'll never come back! (*feverishly*) Oh, yes, I'll go.

JOE. (*looking at her with sudden alarm*) Lilian!

LILIAN. (*calmly meeting his eyes*) Yes?

JOE. Why did you refuse Willie?

LILIAN. Because *then* it was impossible—But now—And besides, didn't Martha tell you I'd be *glad* to go, when I heard he was leaving?

JOE. (*wondering*) Yes

LILIAN. Well, I *am* glad! As you say, he may never come back! At least I shall see him!

JOE. (*Nervously*) Yes—you'll see him—and put the thing bluntly—let him know all. Then, if he does it——

LILIAN. Oh, he'll do it! You shall have your money!

JOE. (*arguing against himself*) I don't know—when he hears about the coal——

LILIAN. That will make no difference—when I ask him—

JOE. You haven't seen him for two years—he may have changed—

LILIAN. Walter? He *never* will change.

JOE. You were hoping he might forget——

LILIAN. One says these things—one doesn't mean them. When shall I go?

JOE. (*growing more and more nervous and apprehensive as LILIAN becomes more excited*) Lilian——

LILIAN. When, Joe—when?

JOE. Lilian—after all—let us think for a moment——

LILIAN. Martha saw no harm in my going?

JOE. (*with a groan*) Martha sees only the five thousands pounds——

LILIAN. (*affectionately*) Dear Joe, the money will mean so much to her! Little May shall go to College! Where is Walter now?

JOE. He's staying with Miss Lesson.

LILIAN. With Miss Lesson? Well, tell me—when?

JOE. They sail to-morrow——

LILIAN. (*with sudden alarm*) To-morrow! Then it is too late!

JOE. No. Write him a line. Say you will call.

LILIAN. When?—(*she hastens to the writing-table*)

JOE. (*in bitter perplexity*) Say at—say at—I don't know!

LILIAN. (*eagerly*) When?

JOE. Say at two.

LILIAN. (*sits at her desk, takes up her pen, then, with despair*) I don't know what to write!

JOE. "I wish to see you before you go—I will call to-morrow at two"——

(*LILIAN writes, repeating every word slowly to herself.*)

LILIAN. (*turning to him*) The address?

JOE. Care of Miss Lesson—180 Campden House Road.

(LILIAN addresses the envelope, then puts in the letter—and hands it to JOE.)

LILIAN. Here, Joe, post it.

JOE. (*holding the letter and balancing it in his hands—then making a sudden movement towards her*) Oh, Lilian!

LILIAN. What is it, Joe?

JOE. (*seizing her wrist and looking searchingly at her*) Lilian, Lilian—have I asked too much of you?

LILIAN. (*smiling softly*) Martha was right—I shall be glad to see him again——

JOE. But——

LILIAN. Ah, Joe, as you said—he may never come back!

(*For an instant they stand face to face; then the door opens slowly and WILLIE looks cautiously in.*

LILIAN sees and ignores him—and walks quietly out of the room through the other door—JOE follows her eyes and sees WILLIE, who rushes eagerly to him.)

WILLIE. (*hoarsely*) She's written the letter? You've got it?

(JOE looks steadily at him for a few seconds, holds out the letter and shows it to him—then turns on his heel, and goes without a word.)

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE:—MISS LESSON'S Studio. A large room with a top light, and a great oak door that leads directly on to the road. The atmosphere of the place is somewhat desolate, the walls having been stripped and most of the furniture removed. There remain a few chairs and a table, an old easel, some broken casts—a pile of canvases, rolled and strapped. There is nothing else left in the room.

(As the curtain rises, MORGAN, the valet, is packing a large lady's portmanteau, evidently brand-new, and cheerfully humming a tune. He is kneeling on the floor : by his side are a number of cardboard boxes, the contents of which he is transferring to the trunk. There is a sharp single knock. He gets up and goes to the door, which he throws open. A PORTER is there, with another cardboard box.)

PORTER. Lord Cardew?

MORGAN. Yes. This ain't the door to come to, though.

PORTER. Not?

MORGAN. Tradesman's door round the corner.

PORTER. Sorry. You'll take it though, cocky—won't you?

MORGAN. I will—cocky.

PORTER. Sign, please.

(MORGAN signs.)

—Morning.

(*He goes.*)

(MORGAN shuts the door, cuts the string, and opens the box. He takes out a fur mantle, which he holds up and admires. Then, careful not to disturb the folds, he lays it down by the side of the other things, and goes on with his packing. There is another knock—three smart taps. He gets up, grumbling, goes to the door again and opens it. JOHN COLLIS is outside. He has smartened himself up, but looks very shabby-genteel.)

COLLIS. Lord Cardew in?

MORGAN. (*with a look that sums COLLIS up*)

No.

COLLIS. (*pettishly*) No—what?

MORGAN. (*calmly*) No—no.

COLLIS. (*discontentedly*) H'm! When will he be in?

MORGAN. Have you an appointment?

COLLIS. I have not. But it's urgent.

MORGAN. Better call again.

COLLIS. When?

MORGAN. Say—quarter of an hour.

COLLIS. Perhaps I could wait?

MORGAN. We're packing—no room. Come again.

COLLIS. (*pompously*) Tell him Mr. John Collis has called—you understand, Mr. John Collis. I shall return in a quarter of an hour.

MORGAN. (*gravely*) I shall not fail to inform his Lordship.

(*COLLIS looks severely at him, and goes.*)

(*MORGAN closes the door and returns to his packing. He is opening the last box and about to put in the last dress when MISS LESSON enters from an inner door, and pauses in amazement.*)

MISS LESSON. Heavens! What *are* you doing, Morgan?

MORGAN. Packing, m'm.

MISS LESSON. (*peering into the trunk*) Ladies' clothes! Mantles! What *does* this mean?

MORGAN. Don't know, m'm. Master's orders.

MISS LESSON. (*fingering the dresses*) These things surely can't be for *me*!

MORGAN. (*gravely*) No, m'm. Don't think so. Fancy colours.

MISS LESSON. Then for whom—?

MORGAN. (*shaking his head*) Master's orders, m'm. Gave no explanation.

(*He puts the last dress into the trunk.*)

MISS LESSON. Extraordinary! When were those orders given?

MORGAN. This morning, m'm.

MISS LESSON. And all these things came this morning?

MORGAN. Within the last hour, m'm. Trunk first—then things to put in trunk.

MISS LESSON. Gracious!

MORGAN. (*pulling down the lid of the trunk*) Initials on it, m'm.

MISS LESSON. (*bending over*) L. A. E. Who is L. A. E?

MORGAN. Don't know, m'm. (*he locks the trunk, and straps it*) Looks like a trosseau, m'm.

MISS LESSON. (*severely*) Morgan!

MORGAN. (*meekly*) M'm?

MISS LESSON. (*pointing to the roll of canvases in the corner*) Put those in the case in the hall, please, and nail it down.

MORGAN. I suppose you couldn't give me a sketch, m'm?

MISS LESSON. You'd like one?

MORGAN. I would, m'm. To hang in the bar.

MISS LESSON. Bar?

MORGAN. I'm marrying, m'm—as you wouldn't take me with you. A public house.

MISS LESSON. With a lady attached, I suppose?

MORGAN. Yes, m'm. Pleasant, comfortable female. Wouldn't have done it though, if you hadn't sacked me.

MISS LESSON. What would you do in Canada? We're sorry to lose you, of course. Well, I hope you'll be happy.

MORGAN. Country tavern, m'm. Bar's very snug. Will you give me a picture?

MISS LESSON. You should have asked me before. They're all strapped up.

MORGAN. Undo 'em in half a minute, m'm.

(He begins eagerly to unstrap the canvases; a latch-key is heard in the outer door.)

MISS LESSON. Take them away—I'll come directly—

MORGAN. Very well, m'm.

(He goes with the canvases, as WALTER comes in through the front door.)

WALTER. Ah! Aunt Susan!

MISS LESSON. *(going eagerly to him)* Walter! what's all this? *(she points to the trunk)*

WALTER. Ah! They've sent the things—

MISS LESSON. Apparently—For whom?

WALTER. I hadn't time to tell you. They're for Lilian.

MISS LESSON. *(staring)* For Lilian!

WALTER. Yes. She's coming here.

MISS LESSON. *(in growing amazement)* Lilian is coming here?

WALTER. *(nodding)* Yes. *He* has sent her, of course. To ask me to sell the place. I told you it was *he* who wanted to buy. She writes she'll be here at two.

MISS LESSON. She has written? Amazing! I saw her yesterday—she said nothing.

WALTER. She says nothing now, except that she'll come.

MISS LESSON. So you went out and bought things?

WALTER. Yes.—At least Carter did—my mother's old lady's maid, you know. I rushed on to her. She's about the same height as Lilian.

MISS LESSON. (*grimly*) I see. An elopement?

WALTER. If she'll consent.

MISS LESSON. Mad, Walter!

WALTER. (*quietly*) He forbade me the house—refused to let me see her, or write to her. Now he has forced her to come here and beg me to sell Cardew Towers.

MISS LESSON. How do *you* know all this?

WALTER. I know Lilian.

MISS LESSON. And you want to carry her off?

WALTER. If she'll let me.

(*There is silence, as they look fixedly at each other.*)

MISS LESSON. (*rising*) And how about *me*?

WALTER. It all rests with you. *You* make it possible.

MISS LESSON. Indeed?

WALTER. She's your god-daughter—she'll be under *your* protection—your friend—

MISS LESSON. And you?

WALTER. I am also her friend.

MISS LESSON. And you imagine her husband will believe—

WALTER. I am not concerned with her husband.

MISS LESSON. And the world?

WALTER. By the world you mean London—we're going to Canada.

MISS LESSON. And her reputation?

WALTER. People will talk. Out there we shan't hear them.

MISS LESSON. (*shaking her head*) Mad, Walter, —mad!

WALTER. Perhaps.—I've been sane so long!

MISS LESSON. Besides—she won't!

WALTER. We shall see.

MISS LESSON. And if she will, *I* won't.

WALTER. You will.

MISS LESSON. Why?

WALTER. Because you are just.

MISS LESSON. Where does the justice come in?

WALTER. Her husband is a brute. Her visit to-day is a fresh proof of that. Imagine what it must mean to her to beg this of me! And there is no one to help her—she has no money—she never can leave him.

MISS LESSON. Things are no different now from what they were.

WALTER. He makes them different. We've never met, or attempted to meet—we've never written. *He* throws us together.

MISS LESSON. (*with the faintest suspicion of sarcasm*) You've arranged it all! These clothes—

WALTER. She must have clothes.

MISS LESSON. And the initials on the trunk?

WALTER. Her maiden name.

MISS LESSON. You've divorced her already!

WALTER. If she comes here to-day she at least shall never go back to him.

MISS LESSON. My poor Walter! But it can't be!

WALTER. I know I'm asking a great deal of you, Aunt Susan—

MISS LESSON. I'm not strait-laced, or conventional—you know that. But it can't be!

WALTER. (*quietly*) I'm an honest man—I think you can trust me. Till *he* has a divorce, or she—that may be possible in America!—but, till then, Lilian is my friend, and yours, under your protection.

MISS LESSON. And if there be no divorce?

WALTER. She will at least have escaped—from *him*.

MISS LESSON. Think of my position, if I consented!—I'm old to play gooseberry!

WALTER. (*still in the same quiet, grave, unemotional tones*) There shall never be a word of love between us, till that word can be honestly spoken.

MISS LESSON. No man is capable of—

WALTER. Except a man who loves.

(*A knock.*)

—That will be she!

(*He rushes eagerly to the door, and opens it. COLLIS is there.*)

COLLIS. Lord Cardew?

WALTER. (*impatiently*) Yes. What is it?

COLLIS. I want a word with you.

WALTER. What about?

COLLIS. (*excited*) Cardew Towers. Most important.

WALTER. You come from the agents?

COLLIS. No.

WALTER. (*annoyed*) What then? I've no time—

COLLIS. (*edging his way in*) Please let me come in. The matter is vital.

(WALTER admits him, unwillingly. Before closing the door, he looks at his watch, then up and down the road.)

WALTER. I can give you two minutes. I'm in a hurry, expecting someone. Be quick, please.

COLLIS. My name is John Collis. I am Joe Tremblett's brother-in-law.

WALTER. (*impatiently*) Well?

COLLIS. Lord Cardew, I have certain information about your estate. I want a thousand pounds for it.

WALTER. Thank you. (*Point to door*) Go, please.

COLLIS. (*eagerly*) The information will be worth a hundred times what I ask—

WALTER. I make no bargain in the dark. Good morning.

COLLIS. (*nervously*) For a hundred down—

WALTER. I've told you. (*He shouts*) Morgan!

COLLIS. Lord Cardew, I'll leave the reward to you. There *will* be a reward?

WALTER. How can I tell? If you've anything to say, say it.

MISS LESSON. Speak, man!

COLLIS. There's coal on the land.

WALTER. What?

MISS LESSON. Coal!

COLLIS. Yes.

MISS LESSON. You say that—how do you know?

COLLIS. I *do* know.

MISS LESSON. How?

COLLIS. I know it with absolute certainty.

MISS LESSON. You're wasting time. *How* do you know it?

COLLIS. (*embarrassed*) I—overheard—a conversation—between Willie Tremblett and Joe—

MISS LESSON. (*scornfully*) Eavesdropping!

COLLIS. Quite by accident.

MISS LESSON. Of course.

COLLIS (*biting his nails*) There is coal. That's why Willie Tremblett wants to buy. He has had secret advice.

WALTER. (*quietly*) Well? Anything more?

COLLIS. (*almost in a shriek*) More! That's enough, I should think! You know what it means?

MISS LESSON. I've heard about you. You sponge on Joe Tremblett?

COLLIS. (*sullenly*) He—he—has helped me.—

(to WALTER) Well, now I've told you. You promised a reward.

WALTER. If the information was of value. It is not.

COLLIS. (*wildly*) Not! Not of value!

WALTER. I've told you. Good morning.

COLLIS. (*almost hysterical*) They want to buy it because of the coal. Well, now of course you *won't* sell. You can get thousands more—fifty, a hundred—

WALTER. But I *shall* sell, Mr. Collis.

COLLIS. (*aghast.*) What! What!

MISS LESSON. You overheard, you say. How do we know you're speaking the truth?

COLLIS. It's true, I swear it! Give me fifty pounds!

WALTER. Good-day, Mr. Collis. (*He flings open the door*)

COLLIS. It's disgraceful—disgraceful!

MISS LESSON. (*sternly*) That's what Judas Iscariot said, when people turned from him. The door!

COLLIS. I won't go—I won't!

WALTER. One thing I'll promise—I won't tell Joe Tremblett what a scoundrel you are. Though he probably knows. Now, go.

COLLIS. You won't give me anything?

WALTER. No.

COLLIS. (*hanging on to the door-post*) You *won't* sell—I know that. I know it's only pretence—I—

(*Losing patience, WALTER takes him by the shoulder, pushes him out and closes the door. Then he returns, and he and MISS LESSON look at each other.*)

MISS LESSON. The man's speaking the truth.

WALTER. Of course. The secret's out.

MISS LESSON. *That's* why Tremblett wants to buy! But—(*wonderingly*) Joe—Joe! That fellow overheard Tremblett telling *Joe*—Oh, I've a terrible suspicion.

WALTER. What?

MISS LESSON. That Tremblett wanted Joe to use his influence on Lilian—

WALTER. Absurd!

MISS LESSON. Bribed him—

WALTER. Can *you* suspect Joe?

MISS LESSON. No—you're right—he's a fine man—told him so yesterday. *He'd* never lend himself—no! But—Walter—well? If there's coal?

WALTER. That makes no difference. If Lilian asks me to sell, I'll sell.

MISS LESSON. (*amazed*) You'll let him have the place at his price?

WALTER. Yes. (*He looks at his watch*) She's late.

MISS LESSON. (*hesitatingly*) Of course if there's coal—

WALTER. It doubles the value—or trebles it. What do I care! But, Aunt Susan, you've not yet told me—

MISS LESSON. You realise what it would mean? You could never come home again—

WALTER. Where Lilian is, there is my home.

MISS LESSON. Give up—everything?

WALTER. It will be for her.

MISS LESSON. (*almost wistfully*) How you love her!

WALTER. (*going to her and taking her hand*) I beg this of you, Aunt Susan!

MISS LESSON. I can only hope she'll have sense enough—

WALTER. (*gladly*) Then you will?

MISS LESSON. Folly's catching! What's the time?

WALTER. Nearly three. (*With sudden anxiety*) Heavens—if—

MISS LESSON. She may have thought better of it—

(MORGAN comes in.)

MORGAN. The luggage is going off, my lord.

WALTER. Take this trunk and send it with the rest.

(MORGAN beckons to the Coachman, who enters and takes trunk off.)

MORGAN. Here's the key, my lord.

(WALTER takes it.)

(to MISS LESSON) I haven't done up the pictures yet, m'm.

(There is a shy knock at the front door.—WALTER rushes up eagerly.)

MISS LESSON. (*craning her neck to see whether it be LILIAN*) I'll come with you now.

(*WALTER has thrown open wide the door; LILIAN stands outside. With a shrug of the shoulders, MISS LESSON follows MORGAN off.*)

WALTER. (*softly*) Lilian! Lilian!

(*She enters; he closes the door. For a moment they stand, looking almost shyly at each other. There is silence—LILIAN moves a little distance from him. In her hand she carries a large square envelope which she now holds out.*)

LILIAN. (*softly*) I've come to—

WALTER. (*interrupting eagerly*) Yes, yes—I know—to ask me to sell the Towers to your husband. I will, of course. What is that you hold in your hand?

LILIAN. The deed for you to sign.

WALTER. Give it to me—I'll sign it.

(*He goes slowly to her, looks into her eyes—takes the envelope and opens it, walks to the table, sits, and glances at the deed. LILIAN holds up her hand.*)

LILIAN. Wait!—there's coal on the land.

WALTER. (*quietly, nodding*) I know.

LILIAN. (*amazed*) You know?

WALTER. Yes.

LILIAN. And Joe—Joe will get five thousand pounds—

WALTER. Joe!

LILIAN. Yes. I was to tell you, he said—you were to know everything. Ah! poor Joe! He hated doing it! But it's for his little daughter.

WALTER. I see.

LILIAN. He has been my *one* friend—and such a friend!—these two years.

WALTER. (*slowly*) Yes—it has been two years . . . And for three years before that, once a month, on your At Home days . . . LILIAN!

LILIAN. (*smiling faintly*) Yes. . . . Oh, Walter, I'm glad to see you!

WALTER. I'm going away.

LILIAN. I know. This afternoon?

WALTER. Almost immediately.—You're late.

LILIAN. Yes. I . . . hesitated.

WALTER. Why?

LILIAN. Why? Ah, Walter! But the thought that you might never come back!—You will?

WALTER. No.

LILIAN. You will! *I* ask it, *I*! It would be too terrible!

WALTER. (*hoarsely*) Do you remember—Oh, Lilian, do you remember—the day when I told you I loved you?

LILIAN. Yes. But we had known long before that—even as children . . . So you will do this for me . . . In five years you will come back—at latest in five years . . .

WALTER. Wherever I've been, Lilian—wherever I've been! . . . I've no photograph—I needed

none . . . I could see you, talk to you—almost hear what you were saying . . .

LILIAN. Am I changed, Walter?

WALTER. Changed! How could *you* change? When I got your letter this morning—I had never dared to hope—

LILIAN. Nor I, nor I! And I wouldn't be here, but for Joe. When he said you might never come back! Never!—It was Martha sent him. The poor things need the money so badly! When I found that my coming to-day would bring them the money—then I was glad—glad! Though of course it's wrong—

WALTER. Why?

LILIAN. Because I knew you wouldn't refuse! And what right had *I* to ask such a favour?

WALTER. Is there anything you could ask of me that I wouldn't do? Don't you know the joy that it gives me?

LILIAN. (*stretching out her hands*) So you'll come back, Walter—won't you? It's selfish of me—but there's so little that I have to live for!—Miss Lesson says I've spoiled your life—and of course I have—but that can't be helped now. And your life is my life, Walter!

WALTER. (*firmly*) You will come with us, Lilian.

LILIAN. (*startled*) What is that you say!

WALTER. Yes—with my aunt and me. You are her god-daughter, and my friend. We shall at least see each other.

LILIAN. (*staring at him*) Walter!

WALTER. (*quietly*) So you will come.—My aunt knows—she approves . . . It has to be, Lilian. We have borne it all very patiently, have we not? Had you been happy—ah, then, you would never have heard of me . . . But, as it is . . . He wants Cardew Towers because there is coal—well, he shall have the place—he should have it if all the gold in the world were there! But *you* shall come to Canada—with us!

LILIAN. (*appealing*) Walter, Walter! Don't ask this of me! I have no strength—he has crushed me! Let us say good-bye to each other—let me go back!

WALTER. Why? We demand so little, we two! To be allowed to live, that's all, and see each other! And there, in the great solitude—think of it, Lilian, not even a village, the nearest town miles away—a farm, a house built of logs—oh, Lilian, we shall be together, for the rest of our life!

LILIAN. Walter, have pity! If you stretch out your hand I'll follow—I must, I can't help it! But you will not. Walter, let me go back!

WALTER. No. It was *he* sent you to me—*he* has decided. You will come with us, Lilian.

LILIAN. No one would miss me—no one—and I am so bruised, I have been so unhappy! . . . No one would miss me—there only is Joe. (*with a sudden start*) Ah, *Joe!* I had forgotten Joe!

WALTER. (*looking at her with surprise*) Joe?

LILIAN. Yes, Joe! What would *he* think? Oh, I daren't do it—I daren't!

WALTER. Joe will get his five thousand pounds.

LILIAN. (*almost indignantly*) Do you imagine he'd take the money if I went away! No—no—when I think of him! I can't do it, Walter! He'd blame me—he'd say it was wrong—and it is wrong, I see it now.

(WALTER *attempts to speak.*)

No, don't say any more! I can't do it—because of Joe!

WALTER. Shall Joe stand between us! . . . Lilian!

LILIAN. There have been days of such sorrow—such black, bitter sorrow—and I sent for Joe—he always came. He is—oh, how can I tell you!—I don't know what he is—he's good, I suppose—that's all . . . But I'll go back, because of Joe!

WALTER. When he sent you to me, he knew—

LILIAN. No, no, you mustn't say that! Willie gave me no peace—day after day—we knew he would never forgive me if I hadn't obeyed him! But Joe didn't like my going—he urged me against himself. Poor Joe, as he stood there, holding the letter in his hand! It was for little May—to send her to College. Ah, don't you see? If I went with you—Joe would reproach himself for the rest of his life!

WALTER. (*passionately*) Not even for Joe's sake can you refuse me, Lilian—not even for Joe!

LILIAN. Ah, Walter, I must!

WALTER. Have you forgotten that afternoon,—when you first told me? We sat in the orchard—in

the next field a boy was whistling—you told me that you loved me, and you kissed me.

LILIAN. (*sinking on to a seat, and burying her head in her hands*) Walter!

WALTER. (*standing by her side, and speaking almost in a whisper*) There were tears rolling down your face—there were tears in the kiss you gave me—the one kiss I've had from you, all my life . . . And I've been waiting, waiting, these many years . . . Ah, Lilian, have you forgotten? Do I not come first?

LILIAN. (*dropping her head lower and lower*) Walter!

WALTER. For an instant then, I held you close to me . . . The next day I spoke to your father—I scarcely have seen you since.—Ah, Lilian, I'm fond of Joe, too, but you must come with me!

LILIAN. (*springing up, passionately*) Yes, Walter—yes! I will!

(WALTER looks at her, and with a mighty effort controls the desire that is in him to take her to his arms. There is a moment's silence, as they stand face. Then, suddenly, a loud imperious knock at the door.)

WALTER. (*starting*) Who can that be?

(*The knock is repeated.*)

LILIAN. (*quietly*) Open, Walter!

(*He goes to the door, throws it open. JOE stands there.*)

Joe!

(*WALTER has fallen back, as JOE comes in and closes the door. The two men make no attempt at salutation. JOE is looking haggard and anxious. He flashes a quick, uneasy glance at WALTER—then goes brusquely to LILIAN.*)

JOE. I've come to take you home.

WALTER. (*stepping forward*) No!

JOE. (*turning fiercely to WALTER*) No! What do you mean? (*He takes LILIAN by the hand*) Come. (*To WALTER*) It must be about time for you to go.

WALTER. Lilian goes with us.

JOE. (*with a strident laugh*) With you? Have you taken leave of your senses, Walter?

WALTER. Miss Lesson is her god-mother—she will be under *her* protection—

JOE. (*roughly*) Rubbish, rubbish! She's coming home with me, now.

WALTER. I've told her I'll sign the deed—

JOE. The deed! But you've a right to fling that at me. I've acted like a cur—yes, a cur.—But at least it's not too late. I'm here, thank God. Walter, you've been a brave man all these years—

WALTER. Ask her.

LILIAN. I must go with him, Joe!

JOE. (*aghast*) Lilian! !

LILIAN. I've suffered too much! I can't!

JOE. (*turning fiercely on WALTER*) This is *your* doing! You've tried to persuade her—talked of your love—(*with bitter scorn*)—your love! But it won't help you! I was right, I see, in not trusting you! She's coming home—with me!

WALTER. (*quietly*) Wait!

(*He rings—then goes to the table, takes the deed, signs it, searches on the front page, makes an alteration, and signs that. JOE stares vaguely at him, not knowing what he is doing. LILIAN stands rigid and motionless.*)

—This first of all. I've signed the deed.

JOE. (*passionately*) Damn the deed!

WALTER. There must be no suspicion of a bargain. I know about the coal, and the rest. Whether Lilian goes with me, or stays, the deed is signed—because she asked me.

(*JOE is about to make a fierce reply, when MORGAN comes in.*)

(*To MORGAN*) I want you to witness my signature. Write your name here.

(*MORGAN signs. JOE paces furiously up and down.*)

(*WALTER turns the page*)—And here.

(*MORGAN signs again.*)

MORGAN. The carriage is here, my lord.

WALTER. (*looking at his watch*) We've time.

MORGAN. Miss Lesson said I was to tell you—

WALTER. Go, go!

(MORGAN goes.)

—(*holding up the deed*) Here is the deed; (*he lays it on the table*) I've made one alteration—inserted your name as buyer. I sell it to *you*, not your brother. Make your terms with him.

JOE. (*in despair*) I deserve this, I deserve it!
(*sinking into a chair*) He thinks he can buy *me*!

WALTER. Buy you—why? *She* asked me to sell—I sell—but to *you*. That's all. Transfer it to him—do what you like. Now—we've finished with that. And I ask you to tell me why Lilian should not come.

JOE. (*scornfully*) Why she should not elope—with you!

WALTER. (*quietly*) There's no question of an elopement—she goes with her god-mother.

JOE. Rubbish!

WALTER. (*with dignity*) Joe, when I say a thing, or promise a thing, I like to be believed.

JOE. (*banging his fist on table*) And then—even then? She's married. isn't she? She's Willie's wife? Come, Lilian!

(*He tries to take her hand—she shrinks from him.*)

LILIAN. Joe, Joe, you who've seen it all—who've been there—

JOE. We can't command happiness—we must do what is right.

WALTER. Your brother ill-treats her—makes her life a hell—

JOE. He's her husband—a wife must not run away from her husband—

WALTER. The husband who sent her to *me*!

JOE. That was *my* doing too! Tear up the deed, tear it up! She refused to obey him—it was I, I, who persuaded her. Because of the money! I did it, because of the money! Walter, Walter, you and I are her friends, the only friends she has. I've been false to her—well, you be loyal! Walter, I've admired you so much all these years—don't spoil it!

WALTER. (*eagerly*) You think she should go back—spend the rest of her life—with this man who hates her?

JOE. Hate, hate—why hate? Besides, that's not true. He's a bully, I know, he cares only for money. But still she's his wife. And there's duty—there's law. One must not set oneself above the law.

LILIAN. Joe, Joe, he's so cruel to me!

JOE. It's hard—of course it's hard. You shouldn't have married him—that was the mistake. But you did it, and you are his wife, the mother of his dead child. You can't get over that, Lilian! You must do what's right!

WALTER. What's right—yes. Well, can it be right that she, who was forced into this marriage by her father—forced, mind you—you know it as well as I—can it be right that there should be no hope for her, no escape?

JOE. (*facing them both*) Words, Walter, words!

One can say these things! You know what I think of Willie! But listen, both of you! You're my best friends—after my wife and children, I'm fonder of you than of anyone else in the world. If I felt it *could* be done I'd be only too glad to say go—go away together—go and be happy! But it can't be—it's wrong—it's not merely a question of sentiment—it's wrong, wrong! (WALTER *tries to speak*)—No—let me finish! You two love each other, and you imagine that justifies all. It doesn't! Lilian has entered into an agreement, a compact—divine or not, it binds her. She must do her duty. Her case is not an exception—there's a woman she knows, worse off than she, who is only kept straight by Lilian's example. (to LILIAN) Isn't that so? You see, you can't answer! And that woman will have a friend too, whom she encourages to do the right thing. And so it travels. Lilian, you're Willie's wife—you've your duty—happy or not, you've got to do it! That's what we're here for. To do our duty, and help others to do the same. Oh, Walter, Walter, you love each other—don't degrade that love!

MORGAN. (*outside, knocking at the door*) It's time, my lord!

WALTER. (*shouting*) Coming! (to JOE *fiercely*) Others, others! She sacrificed herself once, for her father—now you want her to do it for others!

JOE. Yes.

WALTER. Her father sold her—yes, sold her—

JOE. And still she must do what is right.

WALTER. My aunt goes with us—she approves—

JOE. She has not thought it out—she sees only one side—

WALTER. Why should *you* be more rigid, you who are Lilian's friend?

MORGAN. (*shouting from outside, and knocking at the door*) My lord, we shall miss the train!

JOE. *Because I'm her friend!* Go, Walter!

WALTER. Lilian, Lilian, come with me!

LILIAN. Let me, Joe! Let me!

JOE. (*seizing her hand*) Lilian, you must come home!

LILIAN.* (*breaking from him, with a passionate cry*) Home! To the four walls, the four empty walls! My child is dead—my husband sent me here! Am I to go back to him now? Have I not suffered enough? Is death the only release? Joe, Joe, I'll do what you tell me—but—but—be merciful!

WALTER. Yes—be merciful, Joe!

JOE. (*after a second's pause, during which he has stared haggardly at them both, goes to the door, and flings it open*) God forgive me, if I do wrong!

(*LILIAN rushes to him and presses his hand. Then hastens out with WALTER. MORGAN has opened the door of the carriage, drawn up outside, at the window of which stands MISS LESSON, who waves her hand to JOE. The moment they have gone JOE slams the door, and stands, with his back to it, staring straight before him. Outside the carriage is heard going off. The curtain falls.*)

ACT IV.

SCENE:—JOE'S Study.

(MAY is perched on a small step-ladder hanging up a photograph of VELASQUEZ'S "LITTLE PRINCESS." MARTHA is helping her. She looks serious and perturbed. MAY is chatting volubly.)

MAY. Quick, mother—quick! We *must* get it up before he comes in! It'll be such a surprise to him. Oh, how he'll love it! And wasn't it nice of them to let me have it so cheap? I've only a sovereign, I told them, altogether.—Well, they said, you can have it in a cheaper frame. But I wanted *that* frame—father always said there should be a black frame, with a wide mount. Oh, I could nearly have cried! And then the master came out—the chief shopman, I mean—and he said "All right, my dear, you can have it!" He called me "My dear!" but I didn't mind! Wasn't it sweet of him, mother? Oh, I could have hugged him! (*she finally adjusts the picture*) There! I think that's right. Is it straight, mother?

MARTHA. (*eyeing it judiciously*) Yes.

MAY. Let me come down and look. (*she trips down the ladder, steps back, and squints at the photograph*) A little more to the right! Hold the

ladder, mumsie! (*she runs up again, and adjusts it*) That will do, I think. (*she runs down*) Yes—that's good. Oh, mother, won't he be pleased? Of course, he could buy it himself, now that he has all that money. (*she turns eagerly to MARTHA*) Do tell me who left it him, Mother!

MARTHA. Never mind about that, dear.

MAY. I should *so* like to know! I think you might tell me! If he could only see, whoever it was, how happy he has made us all!

MARTHA. (*slowly, with averted eyes*) Yes——

MAY. (*turning and looking at her*) How funny you are! I can't make you out! Why aren't you more pleased?

MARTHA. (*forcing a smile*) Do you want me, too, to run up and down the ladder, May?

MAY. No—but you should be happier! Oh, ever so much!

MARTHA. (*wistfully*) Don't you think I am, dear?

MAY. Of course, you *must* be! Oh, when I woke up this morning, and said to myself "College!" I tell you, I didn't need calling twice! My, how I jumped out of bed! And I danced round fat, grumpy Sarah, till she thought I was crazy! And, do you know, I'd like to take that old typewriter there and chop it into small bits! I would! How it has plagued me, the nasty, stupid old thing! I'd make a bonfire of it!

(JOHN COLLIS *comes in.*)

Oh, Uncle John! (*she dances round him*) Uncle John, Uncle John! (*to MARTHA*) Does he know, mother?

COLLIS. (*sourly*) About the wonderful change in your fortunes? Oh, yes!

MARTHA. (*startled*) You know?

COLLIS. (*squarely*) I do. Certainly. And I congratulate you, of course.

MARTHA. (*gives a frightened look at him—then turns quickly to MAY*) Go now, dear—there's a good girl. I want to speak to your uncle.

MAY. (*pouting*) Mother!

MARTHA. (*moving her gently to the door*) Leave us, dear.

MAY. I *must* be there when father comes in and sees his Velasquez——

MARTHA. I will call you, May——

(*MAY goes unwillingly, pulling a face at COLLIS.*)

COLLIS. (*with all the malice at his command*) And *you* are the person who has been so fond of giving me lectures!

MARTHA. (*facing him*) What do you mean?

COLLIS. Temple of all the virtues, aren't you? Quite another mother of the Gracchi? *Such* a fine woman!

MARTHA. (*boldly*) If you've anything to say, say it.

COLLIS. (*viciously*) We grudge our brother a few shillings, don't we—and tell him he sponges on poor Joe, and is a disgrace to the family? But it's

no disgrace to the family when there are five thousand pounds to be made!

MARTHA. (*very pale*) You know?

COLLIS. Yes. I do.

MARTHA. Well?

COLLIS. Oh, nothing! I don't stand in, of course—but then I've no influence over a handsome sister-in-law. I can't send her to a man's rooms to ask favours of him——

MARTHA. (*firmly, stepping towards him*) John, I won't have it!

COLLIS. Oh, a pretty business! So highly moral, and up-to-date! And now, of course, there's a pleasant scene of family rejoicing. And fine, honest Joe Tremblett—great, big-hearted Joe—will pocket his nice little cheque, and puff himself out, and say “Oh, I *am* so good!”

MARTHA. (*wildly*) I don't know how you've found this out, but we've *nothing* to be ashamed of—*nothing*! And I tell you——

(MAY rushes in, dragging JOE by the hand)

MAY. (*dancing with excitement*) Father, father—look! (*she hauls him in front of the VELASQUEZ*) Well?

JOE. (*wistfully*) Dear little May! You bought that for me?

MAY. Yes, daddy—yes! Aren't you pleased?

MARTHA. May!

(JOE bends over MAY and kisses her.)

MAY. All right, mother.

MARTHA. (*gently pushing MAY towards the door*) May, dear——

MAY. Oh, mother, you *might* let me stop!

MARTHA. Please!

(MAY goes, looking back and making faces at COLLIS as she goes. MARTHA waits till the child has left the room and closed the door—then she goes to JOE, and lays a hand on his arm.)

MARTHA. Joe!

JOE. (*looking from her to JOHN COLLIS, who hasn't budged*) Well?

MARTHA. Joe—he knows about Lilian——

JOE. What!

COLLIS. That you were to get five thousand pounds if she went to Lord Cardew's rooms.

JOE. (*fiercely*) Well? What business is it of yours?

COLLIS. Of mine? Oh, none, of course—none! It has nothing to do with me. I was merely telling my sister——

MARTHA. He has been very insulting, Joe.

JOE. (*stepping menacingly towards JOHN COLLIS*) What?

COLLIS. (*retreating a pace or two, but still holding his own*) Don't you come the bully over me, Joe Tremblett! And insulting—why? Your wife has been in the habit of lecturing me, these many years past. I merely remarked that *she* didn't seem so very particular, when there was money to be made!

JOE. (*looking fixedly at him*) What do you mean by that?

COLLIS. (*jeering*) You know what I mean, Joe Tremblett! You know what you've done for your five thousand pounds!

(*JOE tries to reply, but cannot—He hangs his head.*)

(*triumphantly*) You know what other people would call it, Mr. Tremblett!

MARTHA. (*indignantly*) What *could* they call it? He has done nothing to be ashamed of——

COLLIS. Hasn't he? Look at him!

(*MARTHA turns, and looks at JOE. He stands with his head drooping.*)

MARTHA. (*appealing*) Joe!

(*With an effort JOE braces himself and turns squarely to COLLIS.*)

JOE. See here, John Collis! We've known each other a good long time, haven't we? Well, it's true—I've sunk to your level——

MARTHA. Joe!

JOE. (*still looking at COLLIS*) It's a fact—I have—there's no use denying it—Well, Mr. Collis—and then?

COLLIS. (*disconcerted*) And then, and then! I don't suppose you'd like all the world to know——

JOE. You can cry it on every housetop—or rather

in every gutter! But if you show your face here again——

COLLIS. (*deprecatingly*) Tut, tut, Joe—don't be so angry! You can't take a joke!

JOE. (*grimly*) Do you fancy I'm joking?

COLLIS. (*trying to be genial*) You *do* flare up so! I—I only was chaffing! Why, hang it, you don't really think I blame you? I was merely telling Martha——

JOE. Never mind what you told Martha. We've finished.

COLLIS. Why, my dear chap, you'd have been a fool to let a chance like this go by! You've done what everyone would have been glad to do—I'd have done it myself—I would!

(*Joe makes an angry movement towards him.*)

Oh, very well—I'll go—but I'll look in again. You're a bit excited now—but—just think it over, between you. I shan't want so very much. But you'll find it'll pay you better—to keep *my* mouth shut!

(*Squaring his jaw to emphasize his threat, he goes defiantly.*)

MARTHA. Joe! Joe! Tell me!

JOE. (*dazed, letting himself fall heavily into a chair*) Here. I've got it. (*he takes the deed out of his pocket*)

MARTHA. What?

JOE. The deed. Signed.

MARTHA. Oh! But why——

JOE. Why, what?

MARTHA. Why did you allow John——

JOE. To rank me with him? Because he's right, isn't he? But never mind that. We've got our five thousand pounds.

MARTHA. (*unhappily*) Joe!

JOE. (*his eyes on the deed that he holds in his hand*) After all, as you said, our first duty is to the children. We've no right to be squeamish. A strict sense of honour, and so forth, is a luxury that's denied to the poor.

MARTHA. (*kneeling, wringing her hands*) Joe! Don't talk like that! Tell me what happened!

JOE. He has signed the deed.

MARTHA. You were there?

JOE. Yes. Lilian has gone with Walter.

MARTHA. (*in dismay*) What!

JOE. And Miss Lesson, too, of course. They respect the proprieties.

MARTHA. (*terribly distressed*) Joe, Joe, you can't mean this! It's not true!

JOE. But it is, I tell you. I held the door open myself.

MARTHA. (*unable to believe her ears*) You, you allowed Lilian to—run away from her husband!

JOE. (*rising nervously, and pacing the room*) This woman, after all, was not a mere doll for us to play with. We sent her to Walter, the three of us, for our own purposes. She refused to obey Willie—it was I who persuaded her. Well, they've gone.

MARTHA. Joe, Joe, what have you done?

JOE. Had I the right to step in and say "Go back to your husband—the husband who sent you here?"

MARTHA. *You talk like that! You!*

JOE. (*fretfully*) Why not? There's some truth in it, isn't there—there's something of justice? We wanted this money, all of us—and she was to pay for it. *She* was to go to the man she loved—we shut our eyes to the danger. *She* knew—she was afraid—she begged and implored. Oh no, we said, you must go! You're unhappy at home—we know your husband ill-treats you—we know what your life has been—but *that* doesn't matter! You're a high-principled woman, we said—and we are high-principled people, who want your lover's property and must have it—and you're to get it for us—but mind you come back! And now that she's gone we say "Oh, how dreadful!" and "Who would have thought it!"

MARTHA. (*crying*) You're right! It's *my* fault! Mine!

JOE. (*turning gently to her*) Fault! It's no one's fault. Or, if it's anyone's, it's Willie's. It was his scheme.

MARTHA. Does he know?

JOE. Not yet. I came straight on here. Miss Lesson approves, that's something. Miss Lesson is with them. I sent Willie a wire to the office, he'll be here pretty soon.

MARTHA. (*wailing*) Joe, Joe, what have we done!

JOE. (*staring at her*) Done? Nothing. Why make a fuss? After all, we have the money.

MARTHA. (*her head on her clasped hands*) The money! Ah, Joe, the money!

JOE. (*doggedly*) Five thousand pounds. As Willie said, as much as I earn in thirteen years. (*passionately*) And I don't regret it—by Heaven, I don't! Why should my poor little May have to go as a typist and ruin her health? Doesn't my child come first?

MARTHA. If you only had not allowed Lilian to go!

JOE. *Then* I should have been a bigger scoundrel than I am. I don't know what's right and what's wrong—I tell you I don't. If I've been right, then Lilian has been right too. Oh, leave ethics alone—I suppose we've all been human—don't let's judge anyone!

MARTHA. I'm so sorry, so sorry! And *I* am the cause of it all.

JOE. You—why? *I* did it, of my own free will. And I tell you I'm glad—yes, I am! I'm tired of this beastly life of ours, existing always on the edge of an income. I'm tired of having no money—of this eternal pinching and scraping—of having to deny our children everything. You were quite right—we *had* to seize this chance. And why should *you* be so sorry? Lilian's gone—well, why not? Willie made her fearfully unhappy, didn't he? Why *should* a woman be unhappy all her life—what law is there that commands it? He has only himself to blame.

MARTHA. He'll blame you.

JOE. Let him. Besides, will he care when I show him the deed? And anyhow, that doesn't matter. We have the money.

MARTHA. (*miserably*) We'll have to pay for it, Joe!

JOE. (*doggedly*) My daughter shall go to college. My daughter shall be like other men's daughters—she shall not be a slave and a drudge. Great Heaven, shall I stand by, and see my little girl grow pale and sickly, when I can prevent it? Shall she pay for it all? No. I tell you, I'm glad!

MARTHA. John will talk.

JOE. Oh no, he won't! We'll square John.

MARTHA. Square him!

JOE. Yes. One has to do these things, when one—I was a fool to lose my temper. He was quite right, too, from his point of view. I'll send him a wire, and tell him to come back. I'll do it at once. (*he takes a telegram form, and begins to write*)

MARTHA. (*staying him*) I'd rather you didn't. Let John say what he likes.

JOE. (*pausing*) After all—why not? (*he tears up the form*) What do we care? We have our five thousand pounds.

MARTHA. (*burying her head in her hands, on table*) Oh, I wish we hadn't!

JOE. (*stroking her hair tenderly*) Now, that's, absurd of you, Martha! Just because Lilian's gone?

MARTHA. Yes.

JOE. (*after a pause, during which he has looked*

straight before him) That can't be helped now. I tried to prevent her, of course—but I couldn't—she said things—I caught a glimpse of the truth. I don't know—I may have been wrong—(*with sudden passion*) I don't care! Where's May? Call her, Martha—call little May! I want to see her—I want to see her happiness! We've done this for her, haven't we? Call her!

(MARTHA rises and goes slowly to the door, which suddenly opens and WILLIE bursts in, feverishly excited.)

WILLIE. Joe! Well?

JOE. Here.

(He holds out the deed, which WILLIE pounces upon and glances at quickly.)

WILLIE. (*triumphantly*) Signed! ! ! (*he turns to MARTHA*) Magnificent! Martha, this is owing to you—You've done it! without your help we should never have got it! Oh, fine!

JOE. (*looking grimly at WILLIE*) Yes, it's good, isn't it?

WILLIE. He made no fuss?

JOE. He signed it without a word.

(MARTHA moves away.)

Where are you going, Martha?

MARTHA. (*awkwardly*) I—

JOE. Won't you stay here?

MARTHA. (*with constraint*) No, Joe——

(*She bends over, kisses him, then goes slowly.*

WILLIE sits and turns over the pages of the deed, chuckling to himself.)

WILLIE. Signed—and witnessed! Splendid! Joe, my boy, you've done a great day's work. How did you get it?

JOE. (*looking fixedly at him*) I was there——

WILLIE. You were there? (*he glances up for a moment in surprise*) Ah, well, perhaps you were right,—(*he turns over another page*) Hullo, what's this? (*with sudden anger*) By Jove! what does *this* mean? (*he looks furiously at JOE*)

JOE. What?

WILLIE. Pretend you don't know! *That's* why you went there!

JOE. (*staring at him*) What do you mean?

WILLIE. *Your* name as purchaser! You!

JOE. By Jove! I'd forgotten!

WILLIE. (*sneering*) You'd forgotten! Of course! Oh, you honest man! You fine, noble creature! Who *could* have believed it!

JOE. (*grimly*) Smart, wasn't it?

WILLIE. Smart! Disgraceful! A scandalous trick! You, my own brother——

JOE. As you've often remarked, Willie, there's no such thing as friendship in business.

WILLIE. (*after a moment's pause, then with a sudden change of manner*) Ah, well—though I didn't

expect it of *you*, I confess. (*he becomes playful, and almost genial*) Well, there it is! Oh, you guileless literary men!—Any way, *you* can do nothing with it, of course. . .

JOE. Can't I? I'm the owner of a property that is worth double what I have to pay for it——

WILLIE. (*waving his hand*) Tssch! Where will you raise the money?

JOE. There'll be no difficulty about *that*, when I mention the coal.

WILLIE. (*anxiously*) Come, come, you're joking, of course—you——

JOE. Joking, am I? By Heaven, I've paid dearly enough for this thing—now I'll make what I can!

WILLIE. (*staring*) What do you mean?

JOE. *I* am the purchaser, am I not? Very well—I'm willing to transfer the deed to you——

WILLIE. (*beaming*) Of course! I knew you would!

JOE. But not for five thousand pounds! Oh, no!

WILLIE. How much then?

JOE. Twenty.

WILLIE. (*with a shriek*) What! What!

JOE. Not a penny less. Twenty thousand pounds.

WILLIE. Joe, this is absurd—it's monstrous——

JOE. If *you* don't give it, I'll try elsewhere.

WILLIE. Look here, I'll make it ten——

JOE. No good haggling, Willie. I've got you by the neck.

WILLIE. Twelve! Just think—twelve thousand——

JOE. Mere waste of breath. I'll have twenty.

WILLIE. Joe, I'll make it fifteen. That's my last word. I won't go beyond fifteen.

JOE. Twenty! And if you don't accept now—I'll raise.

WILLIE. (*quickly*) Very well—done—done! You shall have it—I'll give you twenty—By George, you've cornered me—and not many men have done that! Twenty thousand pounds! You shall have it.

JOE. So—that's settled.

WILLIE. (*genially*) Smart—yes, I agree it *was* smart. Hanged if I don't rather admire you for it! Here—(*rises and gets to seat at top of table, taking deed*) let's be businesslike. (*he sits at JOE's table, takes the deed and writes on the back of it*) "I transfer my rights in this deed to William Tremblett, in consideration of the sum of twenty thousand pounds, to be paid within one week." That's right, eh?

JOE. Yes.

WILLIE. "London, the 11th of March, 1905." Here, (*he gets up and hands the pen to JOE*) Write your name underneath. Heavens! a pile of money! But it's worth it!

JOE. It is, eh? (*he holds the pen in his hand and turns his head to WILLIE*)

WILLIE. (*with overflowing enthusiasm*) Ah, my boy, you don't know all! The Great Central will want a good slice of that land for their new extension—and there's a canal close by that we will run

through—there'll be wharves, warehouses, docks—I tell you there's not a square yard of those fifteen thousand acres that I shan't turn to account! Joe, this isn't a fortune—it's a series of fortunes! It's not a hundred thousand—I shall make—it'll be nearer a million!

JOE. (*greedily*) Really! Hang it—then you'd have given me more!

WILLIE. More! I should think I would! But don't you trouble, you've not done so badly! Smart of you—yes—it was—devilish smart! And I don't begrudge you the money—no, I don't! A million—and it may be more—it may be more! Five thousand acres of coal—and a whole town springing up around! Within ten years the sky will be black with the smoke of factories! Ah, by George, now I can do things! I'll endow libraries, too—I'll make a splash with the money! I'll be a philanthropist—why not? it pays. Money! By Heavens, I'll handle that money, and make it increase, and multiply! I tell you I'll do things!

JOE. (*sourly*) And I only get twenty thousand against your million—

WILLIE. For a man who has been making three hundred a year that's not so dusty! You'll find *you* can do things, too—ah, you'll see! Not a bad day's work for us both! A thousand a year for you, Joe—a clear thousand a year!

JOE. I shall be able to take it easier now—go back to my books—

WILLIE. And provide for your children—and

sleep on both ears—and have never a care! While I—oh, you'll see! No more shady companies for me—I shall go square *now*—I can afford it! Was I so wrong, do you think, to want Lilian to go to him?

JOE. (*suddenly remembering*) Lilian!

WILLIE. She has done me a good turn for once—she has!

JOE. (*turns to him*) You haven't been home?

WILLIE. I came straight on here the moment I got your wire. She shall have her allowance—and double, by Jove! She has earned it!

JOE. (*sullenly*) I was there, I tell you—

WILLIE. (*very jolly*) I know—to get him to stick in your name. Oh, artful—very!

JOE. Lilian has gone.

WILLIE. (*starting back*) Eh? What? What do you say?

JOE. Lilian has gone with them.

WILLIE. Are you mad? Gone with whom? Where?

JOE. She has gone to Canada, with Miss Lesson, and Cardew.

WILLIE. What!

JOE. Yes.

WILLIE. (*in agony*) You—let—her—go!

JOE. I did.

WILLIE. You!

JOE. We sent her to him—we knew that they loved each other—

WILLIE. You—my brother!

JOE. You didn't care—you wanted the land! So did I. Well, we've got it.

WILLIE. (*livid*) I—I loved her!

JOE. (*shrugging his shoulders*) Pooh!

WILLIE. I tell you I loved her!

JOE. (*angrily*) And sent her to Walter! Forced her to go to him!

WILLIE. (*almost in a moan*) How else could I get him to sell? How else? And they've gone?

JOE. Yes, I tell you—yes.

(WILLIE turns his face to the wall—there is a moment's silence—suddenly he springs up.)

WILLIE. I'll go after her now—there's time—

JOE. D'you think she'll come back—with you! (*with a clumsy attempt at sympathy*) Miss Lesson is with them, Lilian travels under her protection—

WILLIE. (*breaking in fiercely*) Stop that—don't give me any nursery tales—and I don't want *your* sympathy! Ah, you've done a fine thing, haven't you? Served yourself both ways! Filled your pockets, and sent off my wife with her lover?

JOE. I went there because I was afraid.

WILLIE. Because you were afraid—of course! And, being afraid, you let him bribe you!

(JOE makes a movement.)

Would she have gone unless you consented?

JOE. (*doggedly*) I did consent—yes.

WILLIE. (*savagely*) You admit it?

JOE. See how you've treated her all these years!

WILLIE. None of that! *You've* lost the right to preach! There are twenty thousand pounds in *your* pocket that *she* has earned for you!

JOE. (*quietly*) And a million in yours.

WILLIE. (*in a whisper*) A million in mine! That's so! (*with a sudden change—in savage exultation*) Very well—*let* her go!

JOE. Of course!

WILLIE. After all—after all—what has she been to me? *Let* her go! I'll have a divorce—I'll marry again. What do I care? I have the money—I have his estate—that's something. I've got it at less than a twentieth part of its value—

JOE. (*grimly*) I knew you wouldn't be long before you found comfort—

WILLIE. Comfort! After all—we're not boys! I was just a bit hipped at first—because—well, I loved her—

(JOE laughs.)

I did. But she never cared for me—never. (*with sudden violence*) All right then—draw a line now—close the account—turn over a new page! I'll have a divorce—Yes—I will—And at any rate she'll be disgraced—there's comfort in *that*.

JOE. (*eyeing him quietly*) Another consolation, eh? You'll be finding more soon.

WILLIE. What has she been to me?—the boy's dead. I'll marry again.

JOE. Yes—you'll be able to buy another wife now.

WILLIE. (*exalted*) There's nothing in all this world that I can't buy! Honour, place, power—I can have what I want!—I shall use this money—yes—I shall have men cringing to me—all men. It's the money has bought *you*, brother Joe, with your magnificent principles—it shall buy others! (*with a snarl*) We're in the same boat now—we're brothers at last!

JOE. So it seems . . . (*looking at WILLIE*) And we're sons of one father!

WILLIE. (*shrugging his shoulders*) Yes, I've been a mad ass—I have. Why should *I* mind? She's gone, the jade, with her man—very well, I'll divorce her. Things shan't be too pleasant for them, out there—I'll see to that! And so—to the devil with her, and with all the rest too!

JOE. (*taking up the little framed photograph from his table, and looking at it*) Sons of one father! . . . *He'd* have been very pleased with what we have done to-day!

WILLIE. He's dead—don't worry about him.

JOE. He was an honest man, our father—wasn't he? Proud of his name? *He* didn't care about money?

WILLIE. Because he never had any, that's all.

JOE. (*suddenly springing to his feet, and turning fiercely on WILLIE*) Don't you talk about *him*! Leave *him* out! D'you hear?

WILLIE. What's up now?

JOE. (*wildly*) We're brothers at last, are we? You've caught me, in your beastly net? She can go

to the devil and you'll make things unpleasant for her, and you've got your million?

WILLIE. Got it, and mean to stick to it, I can tell you. Another attack of virtue, eh? It's rather late. (*he snatches the deed*) Good-bye. (*he looks at it*) Hullo, you've not signed it! Here—(*he pushes the deed before JOE*) Just endorse it, will you?

JOE. And suppose I don't?

WILLIE. Come, come, don't play the fool. I want to be off.

JOE. What would the old man have thought of it all? Of us?

WILLIE. Never mind the old man. You've got your twenty thousand—

JOE. (*suddenly*) No, by God, I haven't! And I won't! (*he shouts "Martha! Martha!"*)

WILLIE. (*furiously*) What new game is this? Sign, you fool—sign!

JOE. I won't! Ah! You'd crawl through any muckheap to get your money? And you want to drag me with you? To make *my* name stink, too?

WILLIE. (*holding out the deed and pen*) Sign the deed. Here. Sign it—that's all—you've only to sign—

JOE. We've sold her, between us—haven't we, for this?

WILLIE. (*savagely*) Sign, you fool—sign!

(*MARTHA comes in, anxiously, followed by MAY*)

JOE. Sign it? Yes, I'll sign it! yes! (*he seizes*

the deed, tears it in two, and thrusts it in the fire, cramming it between the bars) There's my signature! There!

WILLIE. (*aghast*) God!

JOE. There! You and I at least shall not profit! Whatever happens to Lilian *we* shall not gain!

(WILLIE *makes a frantic rush to the grate—JOE steps between.*)

No—let it burn! It makes me clean!

(WILLIE *draws himself up—looks steadily at JOE for a moment, then goes to the door. At the threshold he turns and speaks, with deadly hatred.*)

WILLIE. You know what you've done? You're a beggar again. Well, rot in your poverty! Rot!

(*He goes.*)

MARTHA. (*quickly*) Joe!

JOE. May—my little May! (*he puts out his hands to the child*) May!

(MAY *runs to him.*)

May, May, I couldn't do it—I couldn't (*sinks into arm-chair*) I tried, but I couldn't! Forgive me! May, May, you'll have to go to the city!

MAY. (*caressing him*) Daddy! Daddy!

JOE. I'm a failure in life, May—and I've failed again here. I've no money—I never could make any money! I had a fortune—I had only to sign that

paper—and I couldn't do it! I've burned what was yours—I've burned your happiness. But, May, May, it wouldn't have been honest!

MARTHA. (*stealing her arm through his*) Oh, Joe, I'm glad! Oh, Joe, I'm glad!

JOE. (*happily*) Martha!

MARTHA. Yes, I'm glad!

MAY. (*throwing her arms round his neck*) Father, I love you! I'm sure you're right, because it's you! And I love you, daddy—more than ever!

JOE. My little May! (*he draws the child close to him, and buries his head in her curls, as the curtain slowly falls*)

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